



THE INDEPENDENT

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WEATHER: Fine; cloudy later in the north (IR45P) 40p

IN THE TABLOID

MEDIA

THE AD ADDICTS WHO ARE ALWAYS COMPLAINING

PLUS: media and marketing appointments

DEBORAH ROSS INTERVIEW

PAGE 17

PLUS: 28-PAGE SPORTS SECTION

CHESTERFIELD HANG ON

Tiger Woods set out to be golf's new Master, Chesterfield clung to Cup hopes and 29,000 ran round London



Sunday sport: Some of the record 29,000 runners set off in yesterday's London Marathon which produced one of the most thrilling finishes in its 17-year history when Liz McColgan

of Scotland came within a second of retaining her women's title after fighting her way back into contention in the final three miles, just failing to see off Joyce Chapchumba of Kenya

in a desperate sprint up the Mall. The men's race was won by Antonio Pinto of Portugal in a course record of 2:07.55, with Richard Narrikar the first Briton home in fifth position.

One competitor, a man in his forties, died after collapsing during the race. In a day of non-stop sport, Chelsea beat Wimbledon 3-0 in one FA Cup semi-final while Chesterfield forced

a replay with Middlesbrough after equalising 3-3 in the last minute of extra time; Jacques Villeneuve won the Argentine Grand Prix; and Tiger Woods, 21, the American

golf sensation, set off with a final-round nine-stroke lead in his bid to become the youngest winner of the Masters

Photograph: David Ashdown

'Go grammar' lure for schools

EXCLUSIVE

by Fran Abrams and Judith Judd

The Conservatives are to offer "bribes" of £500,000 in government grants to comprehensive schools which agree to go selective.

In a bid to achieve John Major's ambition of a grammar school in every town, a programme costing £360m will be announced shortly, allowing up to 720 secondary schools to select pupils by aptitude or by academic ability.

The Government was forced to drop plans for more selection from its Education Bill last month, and last night the plan was denounced by Labour and teachers' unions as "bribes" to cash-starved schools which were ideologically opposed to selection.

Schools which wanted to take part in the scheme would have to raise £100,000 from company sponsorship or other donations. They would then be able to apply for grants of £100,000 plus an extra £100 for each pupil each year for four years. An average secondary school with 1,000 pupils would collect £500,000 from the government plus an extra £100,000 in sponsorship.

The plans have been drawn up under the umbrella of an existing programme which has already created 150 specialist technology, sport, languages and arts schools.

The Conservative manifesto has promised that the scheme would be extended to one in five of the 3,600 secondary schools in England and Wales. The

new announcement will invite applications - not only from schools wanting to develop the existing specialisms, but also from those which want to become grammar schools.

The Government's budget for the next three years makes provision for the creation of an extra 300 specialist schools, taking the number to 450, but more money will have to be found to raise the total to 720.

The announcement will revive memories of incentives offered by the Government to schools wanting to opt out of local authority control. Despite promises that there would be no financial advantages in opting out, capital grants of up to £500,000 were given to some schools. There were also extra revenue payments which were stopped after criticism from the House of Commons Public

Accounts Committee. The revelation will cause anger among Labour ranks as the party turns the spotlight on education today. The party's leader, Tony Blair, will say in a speech in the Midlands that he wants money from the specialist schools programme to be directed to poorer schools in inner cities.

Last night the party's education spokesman, David Blunkett, said the Conservatives were "totally confused" over their plans for education. "Turning the specialist

schools programme into plans for a grammar school in every town would mean further backing for the best schools at the expense of lifting standards in the inner cities," he said.

Doug McAvoy, general secretary of the National Union of Teachers, said: "This is a bribe to try to persuade schools that are strapped for cash to become increasingly selective."

Mr Blair is likely to criticise the plans in his speech to educationists today.

As Labour stresses that it wants a positive campaign from now on, he will emphasise four major aspects of the party's education policies.

Standards must be more important than school organisation, he will say, and he will criticise what he believes is a Conservative obsession with the mechanics of how schools are controlled and funded.

Mr Blair will also emphasise his party's commitment to making sure that all pupils achieve five high-grade GCSEs or their vocational equivalent by the age of 18.

Under Labour there should be a new emphasis on lifelong learning, he will say.

He will also expand on plans to create a General Teaching Council to oversee the profession. Teachers' unions have had too much control over what happens in schools, he will suggest.

"It is intolerable for children to be saddled with teachers who can't teach and intolerable for the image of teaching to be defined by far-flung resolutions at union conferences," he will say.

Speaking on Radio Four yesterday the education secretary, Gillian Shephard, claimed Labour had not worked to raise standards in the past.

"It is hypocritical for Tony Blair and David Blunkett to maintain that their priority is education when what they are against is choice and diversity," she said.

"What they have been against over the last 16 or 17 years is the rise in standards."

Blair has positive thoughts

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

Tony Blair is planning to refocus Labour's election strategy this week with an attempt to lift the campaign on to more positive issues.

The attempt to bring an end to "tit-for-tat" attacks may also be seen as a reflection of the concern in Labour's ranks that too much negative campaigning is turning off the voters from the election.

Paddy Ashdown, the Liberal Democrat leader, yesterday warned that a "firestorm" of negative campaigning would damage democracy and alienate more voters.

Anarchists left messages saying "don't vote" and "I... the election" drawn on walls in Whitehall after a violent protest



Prescott: Keeping confident

overhauling Labour's long lead in the opinion polls.

The switch to more positive issues, away from the attacks on the Tories over sleaze, were seen by Tory strategists as an attempt to relaunch Labour's campaign after it took some direct hits over privatisation, the unions, and Scottish devolution.

Mr Blair is planning to focus on the health service on Thursday and yesterday unveiled his party's latest poster campaign on its key pledges to take more young people off the dole and to reduce youth crime.

Tory strategists were planning to go on the offensive on election in schools before the final week of campaigning to stop wavering Tory supporters switching to Labour in the final days.

With the latest unemployment figures expected to show

a fall on Wednesday, Tory strategists have decided to attack Labour this week on its key promise to take over 250,000 under-25 year-olds off benefit.

Tory leaders yesterday seized on alleged off-the-record remarks by John Prescott on the minimum wage to try to keep Labour on the defensive.

The Tories intend to keep the focus of their attack on the economy. With three weeks to go, Mr Major is convinced the signs of cracking in Labour's ranks when they come under fire has given genuine reasons to raise Tory spirits.

Denying there had been Labour "wobblers", Mr Prescott urged colleagues not to panic. "This is what elections are about... we must continue putting our case with confidence," he said on GMTV.

Call me Nicolussi, just to avoid confusion

Sebastiano Messina
Luserna

One thing is certain about the village of Luserna in northern Italy: its next mayor will be called Nicolussi.

Not Gianni Nicolussi, the outgoing mayor who resigned in a huff recently and does not intend to stand again. Nor even Luigi Nicolussi, his predecessor, who is also sick of politics. Nor yet Urbano Nicolussi, the venerable councillor who is graciously keeping the village hall ticking over in the run-up to the elections.

No, the race on 27 April will

be between the ambitious young Flavio Nicolussi and Beppino Nicolussi, a retired health worker.

Standing with them on their rival slates will be a whole bevy of Nicolussis: Nicolussi the hotel keeper, Nicolussi the banker, Nicolussi the postman, Nicolussi the bar owner, Nicolussi the mushroom seller.

In fact, only four of the 30 candidates standing for election are not called Nicolussi, and they - two Pedrazzas, a Serafini and a Baldassari - are reckoned to have little chance of winning a coveted place on the village council.

Why not? Because Nicolussis have occupied the mayor's seat and all 15 council posts in Luserna for more than a century. Strangely enough, most of them are not related, or at least not directly. Of the 280 inhabitants of this tranquil mountain village on the edge of the Dolomites, 200 are called Nicolussi.

The name derives from Giovanni Nicolucci, a 15th-century notable who drew up the borders of the Seven Communes of Vicenza on behalf of Count Trapp of Calozazzo. Nicolucci was given Luserna as a reward for his efforts, and the

villagers, most of whom were originally settlers from Bavaria, promptly changed their names to his.

The origins of Luserna come out in the local dialect, an extraordinarily unblemished version of medieval German from around the year 1200. Italian is spoken only to visitors, usually to answer enquiries about the whereabouts of Mr or Mrs Nicolussi, a subject that understandably leads to rather lengthy conversations.

Indeed, the grimmest time of year for the good citizens of Luserna is when the postman goes on holiday and his substi-

tute, sent in from a neighbouring village, is suddenly swamped by piles of letters and packages all addressed to people called Nicolussi. Even the addition of a first name is not much help. Giorgio Nicolussi, for example, could be any one of five people.

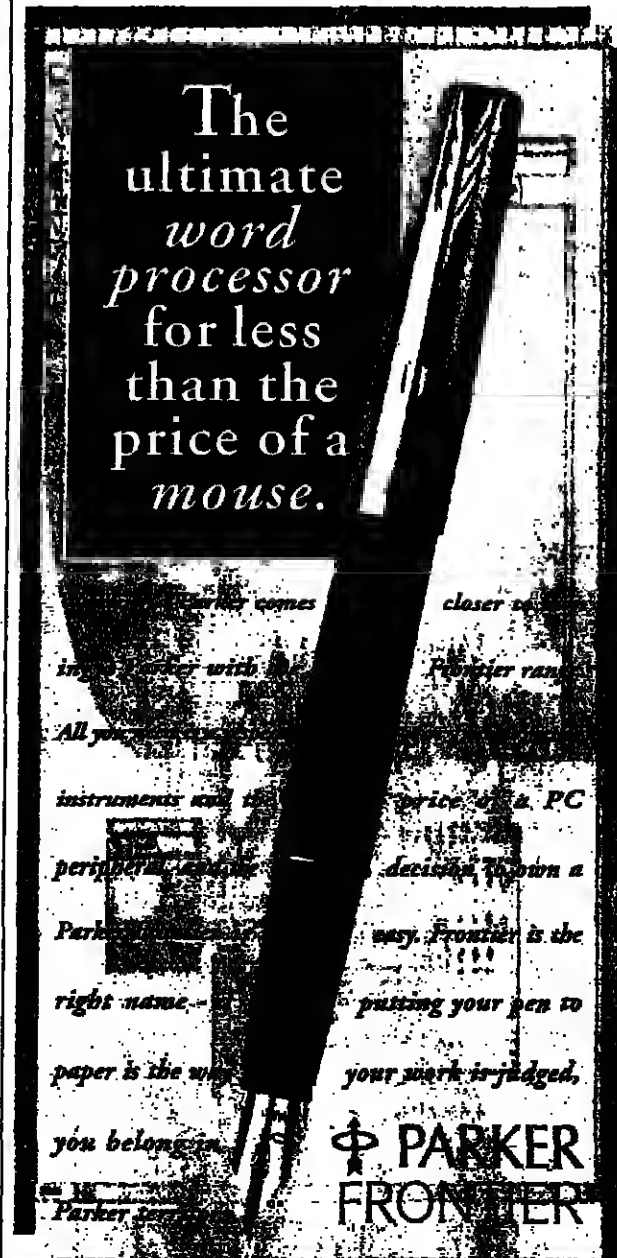
Why doesn't the village go the whole hog and call itself Nicolussa? First because the confusion at that point might just get out of control. And secondly because there already is a Nicolussi just over the hills.

Strangely, the village of Nicolussi doesn't boast a single person called Nicolussi. They all live in Luserna.

election '97

Minimum pay showdown, page 8
Labour veteran on home turf, page 11
Election countdown, pages 8-11
Leading article and Letters, page 18
Sara Maitland and Polly Toynbee
Comment, page 19

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THE BROADSHEET

Arts 16
Comment 18, 19
Crossword 24

Election '97

Features 17
Foreign News 12-15
Gazette 20

Home News

Leading Articles 18
Letters 18
Obituaries 20

MEDIA+ TABLOID

Listings 24, 25
Radio & TV 27, 28
Weather 26



news

significant shorts

Cocaine haul worth £20m marks triumph for Customs

Customs officers yesterday seized cocaine with an estimated street value of up to £20m from a ship which arrived in Avonmouth, near Bristol, from Colombia.

It is not known whether the drugs were intended for the UK market but the seizure, thought to be the largest cocaine haul so far this year, was hailed as an "enormous success" for Customs authorities and police.

Around 200kg of high-purity cocaine was discovered in watertight kitbags concealed below the water-line of the Cyprus-registered Margo L by divers from Avon and Somerset police. They were called in by Customs officers carrying out a routine search of the ship.

Boy hit by train loses both legs

Schoolboy Nathan Stephens, hit by a goods train in an horrific accident, remained "critical but stable" in hospital last night after losing both legs. His distraught parents, Barry and Helen, spent the weekend by his bedside at Morriston Hospital, Swansea, where he is on a life support machine. Nathan, of Commercial Street, Kenfig Hill, Mid Glamorgan, was struck by the train on Friday night as he played in a local wood with friends on his ninth birthday.

British Transport Police believe he tripped while trying to cross the busy track which carries Inter City trains from London to Swansea. Officers have urged parents to warn their children of the extreme hazard of going on to railway property.

Horses blamed for fatal pile-up

A motorcycle passenger was killed in a multiple crash after horses strayed on to a road, police said. Five vehicles were involved in the crash on the west-bound carriageway of the A30 near Bodmin, Cornwall on Saturday.

The horses were struck by three cars and when the motorcycle hit one of the animals both rider and pillion passenger were thrown off, said a police spokesman. The pillion passenger was hit by another vehicle and fatally injured. One of the horses was killed.

Kray stands trial over drugs ring



Charlie Kray and two other men accused of involvement in an alleged £78m cocaine supply ring are due to stand trial today. Mr Kray, 70, of Sanderstead, Surrey, and builder Ronald Field, 49, of Raynes Park, south-west London, are charged with conspiracy to supply cocaine, being concerned in supplying 2kg of cocaine, and conspiring with each other to supply 1,000 Ecstasy tablets.

Electrician Robert Gould, 39, of Wimbledon, south-west London, is charged with conspiracy to supply cocaine, and with being concerned in the supply of two kilos of the drug at an Essex hotel. The trial at Woolwich Crown Court, south-east London, is expected to last two months.

Old Scotch rocks auction world

A bottle of Campbelltown scotch, distilled in Argyll in 1952, bottled in aid of the Lockerbie Disaster Fund and auctioned by Terry Wogan on television, is set to fetch up to £1,000 at a whisky sale in Glasgow. At the same Christie's auction on 30 April, a 50-year-old bottle of The Macallan, one of the world's finest malts, distilled and bottled in Craigellachie, is expected to fetch up to £4,000. A bottle of Glenfiddich of similar age, distilled and bottled in Banffshire, should realise up to £3,500 at the same sale, while a 64-year-old Dallas Dhu, at Forres, Morayshire, has an estimate up to £3,000. A bottle of 50-year-old Balvenie, distilled in Dufftown, Banffshire, could fetch £1,500.

Couple arrested over stabbing

Police investigating the murder of a man found stabbed at his home have arrested a man and a woman. The body of George Atkinson, 42, was discovered by his wife Linda when she went to investigate a noise in the couple's home in Woolfall Crescent, Hutton, Merseyside on Saturday. Mr Atkinson was pronounced dead at the scene. Police said today they were anxious to trace the driver of a red Ford Sierra taxi with a green Knowsley plate.

Holy break fails to tempt disciples

A cathedral's offer of "holy holidays" has fallen on stony ground because of lack of interest. Portsmouth Cathedral in Hampshire has been forced to cancel weekend breaks to the city this month and in June after a poor response. The Portsmouth Perspective trips offered visitors the chance to see the cathedral choir rehearse, take part in services and visit the D-Day museum. But the Provost the Very Rev Michael Yorke, who is acting as tour operator, admitted: "The response was not what we had hoped for."

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OVERSEAS AT BK REFERENCE

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people



Eddie Stobart: 'You only get one chance to make a first impression' (Photograph: Ted Ditchburn)

Motorway gridlock puts trucking giant on the rails

Eddie Stobart, the nation's favourite trucker, and the man whose distinctive fleet of green, white and red lorries has become a legend in its own right, is poised to make the transition from King of the Road to King of the Rails.

The dozen of haulage contractors (who insist on the highest standards of dress and decorum from his drivers, and of paintwork and performance from his vehicles) has become so concerned at the congestion afflicting Britain's motorways that he now plans to use dedicated trains to carry consignments of food and drink up and down the land, thereby removing 100 of his lorries from service.

"If rail is the most cost-effective way to distribute goods then we will do it, because if we don't, our competitors will," said Barrie Thomas, his firm's commercial director. "Five years from now, who knows what the congestion on Britain's roads will be like?" The news may come as something of a blow to the army of "Stobart-spotters", for whom eagle-eyed attention to the individual names emblazoned across the cab of each truck relieves the tedium of transit. Members of the 15,000-strong Eddie Stobart Fan Club may draw some consolation, however, from the fact that Stobart trains will be painted in the same, distinctive livery as the lorries - the biggest privately owned fleet in the UK.

Image is important to Mr Stobart. A driver who "fell foul of his strict shirt-and-tie dress code during the 1995 harvest was sacked. Although the man's claim for unfair dismissal was settled out of court, Mr Stobart says firmly: "You only get one chance to make a first impression - drivers must look the part."

While no date has been fixed for the rail service to begin, £25m has already been invested in a distribution centre at Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal in Northamptonshire, with links to the Channel Tunnel. Perhaps from there Mr Stobart can take on his French counterpart - the equally well-loved Norbert Dentressangle. But that's another story. Adam Lough

Woman priest at St Paul's faces legal challenge

Reverend Lucy Winkett (right), the woman priest whose appointment at St Paul's Cathedral sparked a row in the Church of England, is to be challenged in the High Court, it is emerged yesterday.

Anglo-Catholic priest Father Paul Williamson is to seek a judicial review of Rev Winkett's appointment as a minor canon, which he blames on a "loony liberal" leadership which is tearing the Church apart.

Miss Winkett, 29, yesterday said she would not be backing down in the face of threats of court action, but refused to discuss her feelings about the animosity her selection has aroused.

Her appointment in February provoked a split in the ranks of the St Paul's chapter, with the cathedral's Chancellor, Canon John Halburton, announcing that he did not recognise her as a priest and would not attend any service where she was officiating.

Fr Williamson, vicar of St George's, Harworth, Middlesbrough, told BBC Radio 4's Sunday programme that Miss Winkett's appointment was a breach of the historic statutes of the cathedral. "I have nothing against women



I think they're wonderful. The appointment of a woman as canon at St Paul's is simply not possible because the statutes state quite clearly 'clergyman' and 'he' throughout, from the time of Richard II.

Fr Williamson has been a thorn in the side of the Church's leadership since the General Synod's 1993 decision to ordain women, disrupting ordination services and taking the Archbishop of Canterbury to court for treason and heresy. In February he defied an order from the Archbishop to drop the name of Diana, Princess of Wales, from the State Prayer.

Fiat heir's double bombshell

Giovanni Alberto Agnelli, the dazzling heir apparent to Italy's massive Fiat empire dropped two bombshells yesterday: He is suffering from cancer. And he and his new American wife are expecting a baby. Mr Agnelli, 32, made the revelations in an interview published by the Turin newspaper La Stampa, owned by his family.

The Agnellis are Italy's uncrowned royal family, and control the country's large private conglomerate.

Mr Agnelli, who is often called the "Italian JFK Jr", is now in New York being treated for what he said was a rare type of intestinal cancer. He said it was discovered when he was hospitalised in Turin just before Easter for peritonitis. Agnelli said he was being treated in New York because his doctors there were very experienced in this type of cancer. "I expect to recover fully by the end of the summer," he said.

Mr Agnelli also revealed that he and his wife, Avery Frances Howe, an architect with American and British citizenship, are expecting a child. One of the world's most eligible bachelors, Mr Agnelli was married five months ago in a private ceremony at his family's 16th century Tuscan villa. AP, Rome

briefing

HOUSING

Homes must last longer than the Pyramids

Houses built today will have to last longer than the Pyramids or Stonehenge, if the present rate at which old properties are replaced by new homes continues, according to a study published today. Britain has the oldest stock of homes in Europe, according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, with one in four properties built before the end of the First World War.

And the rate at which old homes are being replaced by new ones has dropped dramatically in the past 25 years - from 91,000 to just 8,000 a year. If the present rate of clearance is allowed to continue, houses built today would not be replaced for an average of 2,800 years, or 5,600 years in England and Wales - longer than the current age of Stonehenge or the earliest Egyptian pyramid.

Yet more than 1.6 million homes in the UK (one in 14) have been officially rated by Government criteria as either unfit for human habitation or falling below the tolerable standard. A Government survey found the problem was worst in Wales where one in eight occupied properties was considered unfit.

The State of UK Housing, £15.95, Policy Press, University of Bristol, Grange Road, Clifton, Bristol, BS8 4EA. Glenda Cooper

ROADS

Speed cameras are no deterrent

Speed cameras are failing both to deter over-fast motorists and to punish them properly, says a survey published today. Only 20 per cent of drivers said the risk of being caught by a speed camera made them drive within the speed limit at all times. Of those caught by a speed camera, only one in 10 received a fine or had penalty points on their licence.

The survey, by insurance company Touchline, also showed that 80 per cent of motorists admitted exceeding the speed limit. Only 30 per cent said they had been knowingly caught by a speed camera while 40 per cent said they only drove within the limit when warned that they were approaching a camera and 60 per cent made a mental note of where the cameras were so they could alter their speed accordingly.

BROADCASTING

BBC flops score global ratings

Nostromo and Rhodes may have flopped in the UK, but they have proved an overseas success and helped boost BBC international sales to an all-time record, it was disclosed yesterday. The expensive epic feature in the top-10 best-selling BBC TV programmes of the past year, even though they drew poor audiences at home.

BBC Worldwide announced 1996-97 sales of £112.1m, a 20 per cent leap on last year's figures.

Boosting commercial income from overseas sales and forthcoming pay channels is the key to the BBC's strategy to increase its financial resources in the face of an inflation-linked licence fee. Last year, the Director-General, John Birt, announced an aim to treble commercial income in the next decade, saying this was needed for the BBC to compete in an ever more crowded media market.

Topping the BBC bestseller list was *People's Century*, the highly acclaimed 26-part documentary of key 20th century events, as told by those who lived through them.

Top 10 best-sellers

1. *People's Century*
2. *Rhodes*
3. *Dancing in the Street*
4. *Pride and Prejudice*
5. *Silent Witness*
6. *Ruby Wax Meets...*
7. *Killing For A Living II*
8. *Dangerfield*
9. *Nostromo*
10. *Wallace and Gromit*

MEDICINE

Tree frog hope for Alzheimer's

A South American tree frog is helping British chemists develop a super-painkiller that may also offer hope to sufferers of Alzheimer's disease. The scientists are copying the molecular structure of a poison secreted from the skin of the brightly coloured tree frog *Epipedobates tricolor*.

Using the natural substance epibatidine as a starting point they have created designer compounds with enormous medical potential.

Dr John Malpass and his team from the University of Leicester are co-operating with a major drug company on the research, which holds out the possibility of producing a painkiller 200 times more powerful than morphine but without the usual side-effects.

Because it works in an entirely different way from morphine and other opiates it may also provide an effective treatment for Alzheimer's disease, by boosting memory.

Naturally occurring epibatidine cannot be used because it is so toxic. But it is possible to create safe compounds by copying its chemical structure and modifying it and combining it with other molecules.

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John's in 120

Getting into the frame: Tubes and hoardings become showcase for a new creative breed

Art goes public as students tap into billboard power

Paul McCann
Media Correspondent

While shaven-headed creative types in advertising agencies may already think of what they do as art, an American movement that uses advertising sites as art galleries has taken off in the art colleges of Britain.

London Underground is to give over some of its advertising sites to satisfy the demand from art students and already an unknown guerrilla artist has started, without permission, using the advertising spaces in tube trains to exhibit their work.

This month LU found six rogue pieces of work made to size and placed in the advertising slots above passengers' seats. The drawings, a mixture of photography and drawing, are signed only as © 97 SN G. One seen by the Independent takes as its subject women having sex while drunk.

Because of the numbers of

Covent Garden is covered with posters that are someone's art

students asking if they can display their work, TDI, the company which sells advertising on the Underground, has decided to give over a part of its showcase Angel tube station to student artists' work.

But the trend is not confined to London. Last month Louise Gridley, a student at Sheffield Hallam University, booked a 10 ft by 20 ft poster site to display a piece of work from her final-year show. The work was designed as a comment on the way sex is used to sell chocolate. She claims that within a few days Cadbury had pressured the poster company, Mills & Allen, to paste over her work, but the

company denies censorship. "Within advertising the chocolate bar is often seen as a phallus, the woman luxuriating in her moments of pleasure," said Ms Gridley. "My posters titillate and poke fun at the association between sex and chocolate."

Meanwhile in Birmingham, Surely?, a nine-strong group of artists and designers, is using advertising space as a means of getting their art to as wide an audience as possible. Surely? has used flyposting and the advertising spaces in buses to get its work seen and in the summer is planning to move on to bigger billboards and large projectors to impose its work on a whole street.

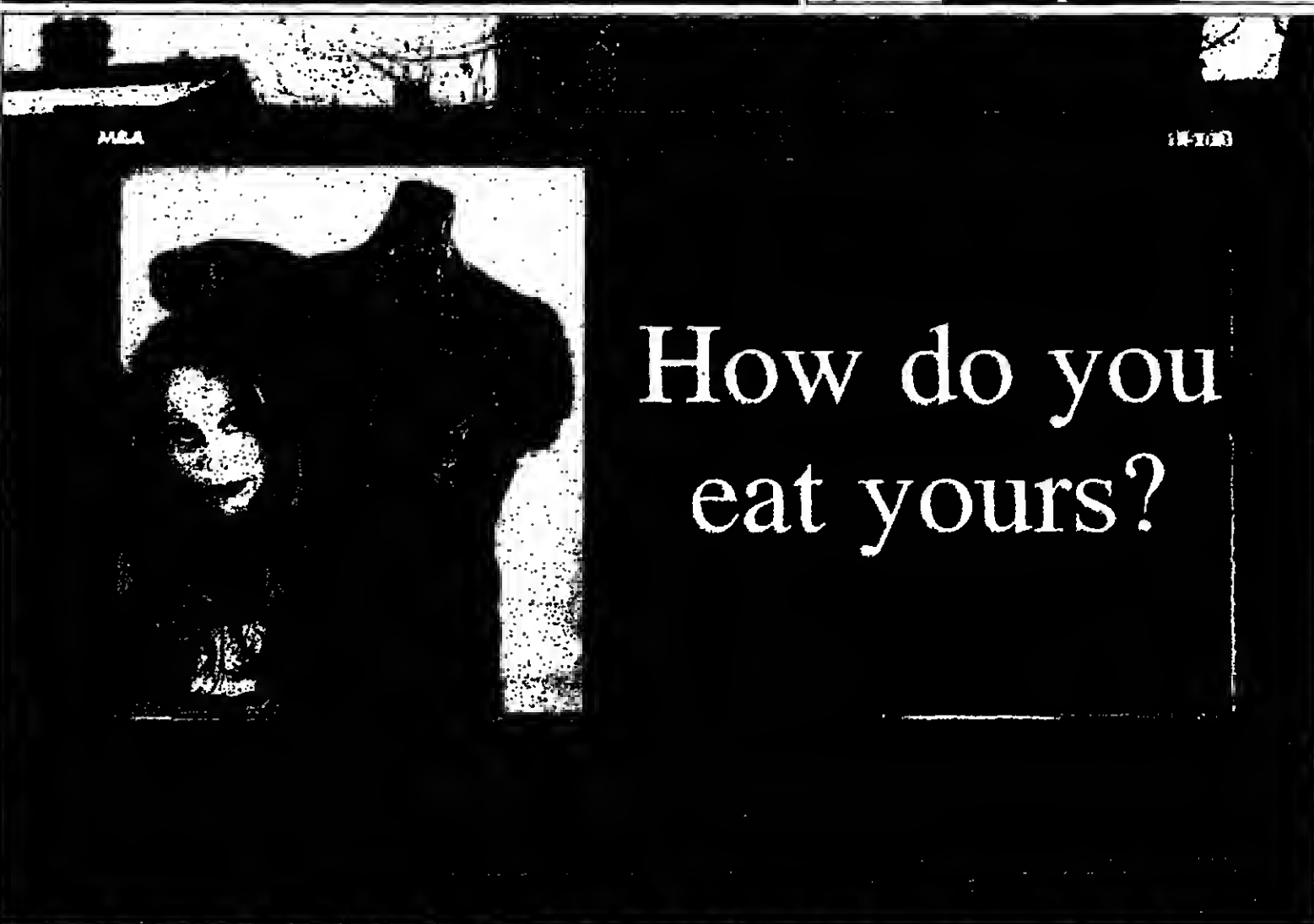
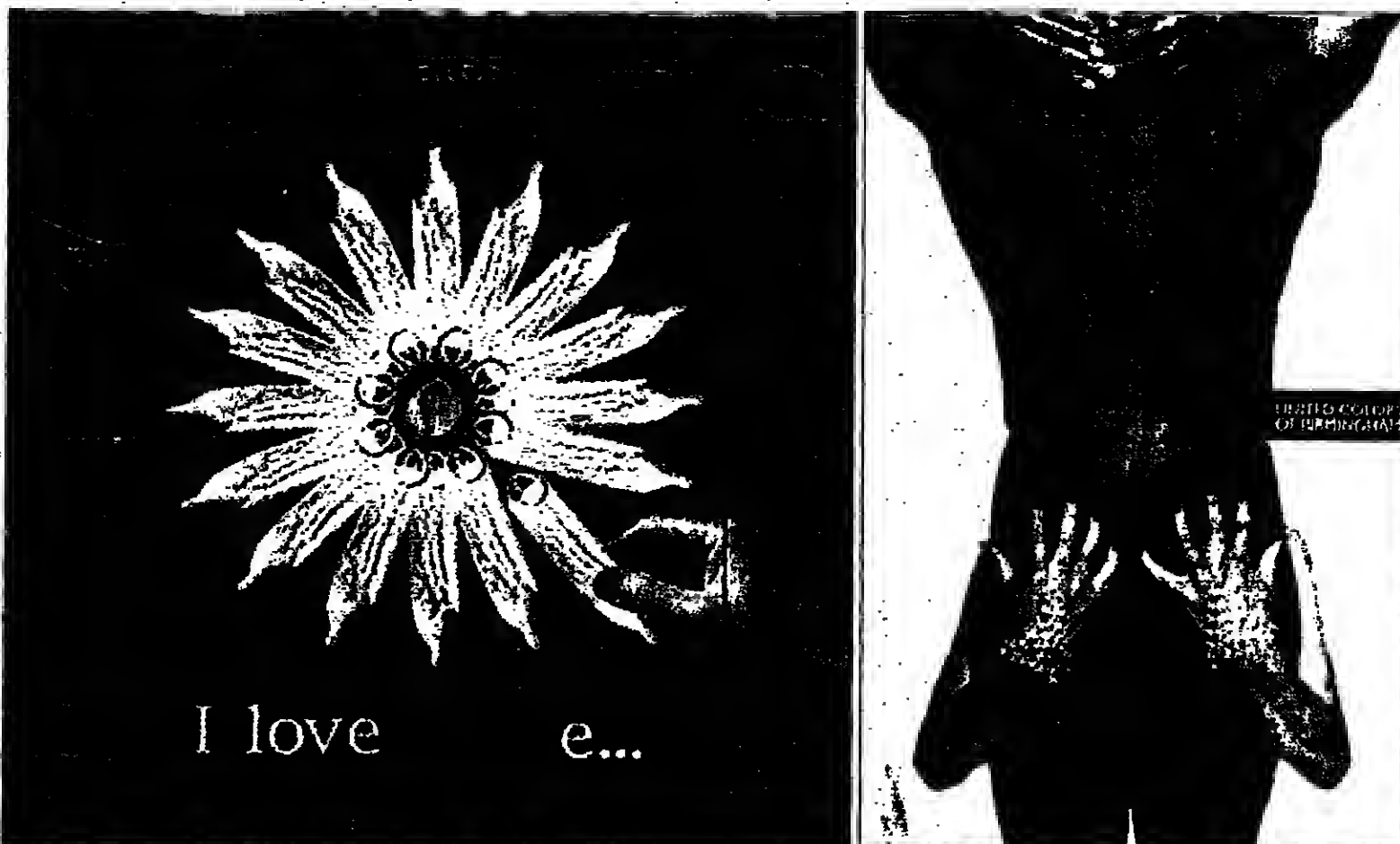
"We are looking for a mass audience rather than a gallery elite," said Andy Robinson, a member of the group. "We also want to infiltrate advertising space so that we can create a little blip in people's minds. Something that stops them for a few seconds rather than just washing over them like all the other visual messages they see."

Ironically, one of Surely?'s works, titled *United Colours of Birmingham*, has ended up in the Photographer's Gallery in London.

The subversion of advertising by creating art that uses the language and spaces of advertising was pioneered in the Eighties by the American post-modernist artist Barbara Kruger. Kruger, a former designer at *Elle* magazine, used billboards in Times Square in New York to make ironic comments on consumerism and shopping.

There was also work by the art collective The Guerrilla Girls which used bus shelters and Tube trains as agitprop to expose male dominance of the arts. Photographs of their graffiti-posters is now highly collectable.

"There has been a movement gaining ground to reuse space because the Art Council is cutting back and there is less space available for art students," said Lorraine Gammon, senior lecturer in cultural studies at St Martins School of Art in London. "Covent Garden is just covered with fly posters that look like ads that turn out to be someone's art."



Designer art: Some of the pieces that have been displayed on advertising billboards. Top: The Surely? design team's work 'Daisy Daisy', a condom daisy (left) and a view of *United Colours of Birmingham* in the city (right). Above: Student Louise Gridley's poster which formed part of her final-year show

However, she believes some of the motivation for the trend is artists looking to get a job in advertising. "The space between consumer culture and art is narrowing," she said. "You only have to look at Diesel jeans ads to know that people in advertising completely understand semantics - which was supposed to be used to deconstruct advertising in the first place. It seems more like the case that these students realise that once you can deconstruct advertising

you can put it back together even better - and then you can get a job in advertising."

As if to confirm this, TDI plans to cash in on this by linking its Angel gallery with creative directors in advertising

agencies to encourage the agencies to use its spaces. "The fact is they're all obsessed with being bloody famous," said Professor Gammon, "so that some of the art is connected in ego rather than meaning."

Theories about how the moon might have an effect on mood usually rely on the changing gravitational pull of the moon.

Lunacy not linked to dark side of the moon

Roger Dobson

The full moon looks finally to have been given a clean bill of health as a cause of mental illness. Although history and literature are peppered with cases of mentally unbalanced acts linked to specific parts of the lunar cycle - hence the word lunatic - new research may have finally disproved the theory.

Despite scepticism about the effects of the moon, there is still a belief that it can affect moods, with reports that some medical consultation rates for anxiety and depression wax and wane at different parts of the cycle.

To test the lunar-effect theory a team of researchers set out to trace the activities of more than 700 anxious and depressed patients over an 18-year period to see if their psychological illness was affected by the moon. Their conclusion is that it probably wasn't. But the team does not discount the lunar effect altogether and says some individuals may have mood swings on certain days of the lunar cycle.

The research was based on the number of times the patients arranged an appointment to see their GP during the different phases of 221 lunar cycles over the 18 years.

There was little difference, but the report of the research says: "It might well be that the moon has only a moderate and short-term impact, not leading to consultations."

The report, in the current issue of the *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, also suggests the possibility that individuals may have been so incapacitated by the effects of the moon that they were unable to make an appointment. It suggests further research, and adds: "An influence of the moon on psychological well-being and behaviour may have important economic and public health implications due to health service use and changes in job performance, including absenteeism, or other social activities."

One of the researchers, Professor Greg Wilkinson, of the Royal Liverpool University Hospital, said yesterday: "Despite scepticism, the idea of the moon having an effect on mental health is still widely believed, even by some doctors. "We don't dismiss the idea of an effect, and it is possible, for instance, that patients suffering with the effects might not have been capable of making an appointment."

Theories about how the moon might have an effect on mood usually rely on the changing gravitational pull of the moon.

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Cliff's oxygen of bad publicity

David Lister
Arts News Editor

Sir Cliff Richard has authorised the staunch promoters of his *Heathcliff* musical to advertise the "stinker" reviews the show and his performance have received. Newspaper adverts will this week feature quotes such as "This Wretched Show" and "It Was Like Watching The Pope Smoke Dope". "The Bad-Taste Theatre Event Of The Decade" and "Withering Rather Than Wuthering".

Generally quotes from reviews in adverts for plays go to the other extreme, taking phrases out of context to hype the

show's worth. Sir Cliff's decision to break with precedent comes from his increasing frustration with the different reactions of critics and audiences.

The London run of *Heathcliff* at the Labatt's Apollo in Hamersmith is being extended by a month due to demand for tickets, and Sir Cliff has told his management he wants all advertising to contrast the loathing the critics felt for the show with the fans' acclaim.

So the *Heathcliff* adverts will proclaim: "When Reviews Aren't Good Audiences Know Better". And beneath the stinker quotes will be a statement "Every box-office record

show's worth. Half a million tickets and 320,000 *Heathcliff* albums sold."

He has also alerted the *Guinness Book of Records* to the show's opening advance takings of £4m, believed to be a theatrical record.

Heathcliff, a musical adaptation of Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights*, is directed by Frank Dunlop and has played in Birmingham, Edinburgh, Manchester and London. Critics were near universal in their scorn for the show and the incongruity of Sir Cliff playing the dark, brooding, violent and abusive hero of the book. It had been Sir Cliff's secret ambition

for the decades to play the part.

Reminding people of the poor reviews he has received seems a high-risk strategy on Sir Cliff's part. But a spokesman for the show said last night: "Cliff has been desperate to show off the fact that the punters love it and the critics don't. Deliberately publicising appalling reviews hasn't been done before. But Cliff was very, very keen that we print the negative quotes alongside the audience figures. He is very struck by the difference in opinion between the critics and half a million paying members of the audience. Certainly it is the latter whose

opinions he values more."

Ironically, Sir Cliff's claims to play a demonic character were given unlooked-for support last week. The American evangelist Geoff Godwin, in Northern Ireland on a lecture tour entitled "The Hidden Dangers of Rock Music", said Sir Cliff had led young people astray, his life was built on money and adoration, he sang "lustful lyrics" and made hundreds of thousands of pounds from "adoring fans who idolise him and not God".

A spokesman for Sir Cliff responded: "Cliff believes everyone is entitled to their own opinion, and he will answer to God."



Novel approach: Sir Cliff Richard with Helen Hobson in *Heathcliff*, which was panned. He has insisted that ads this week should feature some of the worst 'stinker' reviews

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news

Catholics creep back to homes wrecked in loyalist riot

Colin Blackstock and David McKittrick

Eight Catholic families who were forced to flee their homes on Saturday night returned yesterday to count the cost of the damage after rampaging loyalists ransacked two flats and attacked other houses in north Belfast.

The loyalists, who were wearing masks, broke into flats in Limestone Road and destroyed windows, doors, furniture and fixtures in an orgy of destruction.

They then went on to attack other homes in the street as stone-throwers smashed windows and threatened to set fire to blocks of flats.

Mary Boyd, 75, a Catholic woman who was at mass during the destruction, came home to discover that her house had been targeted. Her son who lives nearby had heard the disturbance and gone to stop the attack only to be beaten with a

stick by those damaging the house. Mrs Boyd said: "All the windows at the front of the house were smashed and I only just got those put in a fortnight ago when they were smashed."

"My son arrived at the house and there were about eight or nine men there smashing the window and trying to break the door down."

Mrs Boyd's son Jim, said: "They were shouting the usual things. You know, fenian bastard, the UVF, the UDA. But I kept telling them it was only a pensioner that lived there. Then they just ran off."

Trouble flared on Saturday night when rival groups of up to 200 youths clashed and began throwing stones and bottles at one another in an area where Catholic and Protestant housing estates meet.

Police wearing full riot gear and backed up by the Army moved in to try to separate the rival factions only to come under attack themselves. The po-



Besieged: A police landrover guards the home of Mary Boyd, 75, in North Belfast's Limestone Road, which was targeted by rampaging loyalists

lice managed to defuse the situation by driving loyalists back into the Tigers Bay area.

One woman who lives in the area blamed the attacks on a "thug mentality". She said: "If you ask me, this isn't about Protestants and Catholics. This is just about hooligans using religion to cause trouble."

Cecil Walker, Ulster Unionist MP for North Belfast, condemned those involved in the rioting. "These people are just a hooligan element from the Protestant side," he said.

"A carload of hooligans went into the area and just caused a lot of trouble. I condemn this sort of behaviour completely."

North Belfast is one of Northern Ireland's most violent areas and has also been one of the most frequent scenes of sectarian conflict.

The demographic make-up of the area has changed considerably in the last two decades with an exodus of Protestants matched by a steady growth in

the Catholic population. Regular clashes have led to the erection of more than a dozen "peace lines" to keep the two sides apart.

Mr Walker said he was worried that the continual trouble in the area would have dire economic consequences. "I'm very worried that if this coo-

tinues on a regular basis, then the Government won't go ahead with their investment plans," he said.

Sinn Féin's Gerry Kelly who is standing in the election in North Belfast, where the violence took place, accused loyalist paramilitaries of orchestrating the violence.

Woman is bailed on suspicion to murder at rally

A 28-year-old woman has been bailed on suspicion of conspiracy to murder after clashes in London's West End on Saturday at a rally to support striking dockworkers, writes Mark Rowe.

Her arrest came after militant protesters allegedly tried to drive a lorry at a line of police. Two men held in connection with the allegation were released without charge.

An estimated 1,000 police in riot gear, including dozens of mounted police, were involved in clearing Trafalgar Square of about 1,500 demonstrators who refused to leave the area.

Sixteen people have been charged with various public order offences including assault and criminal damage and are due to appear at magistrates courts in London today. In all, 29 people were arrested amid clashes outside Downing Street and in Trafalgar Square.

The Liverpool Dockers' Support Group was joined at the rally by the direct-action anti-car movement Reclaim the Streets and other environmental groups. Police stressed that the violence did not appear to involve the striking Liverpool dockworkers, many of whom brought their families with them for their Social Justice March, during which a petition was handed in at Downing Street.

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Britons injured in blast at restaurant

Matthew Brace

Two British men were badly injured in a grenade attack at a restaurant in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa.

John Bown and Blair Davies, who were part of a government-backed taskforce working in the East African country training local police officers in a range of skills - including personal protection - were dining with their wives and a fifth Briton in the Blue Tops, a popular restaurant, when a grenade was thrown through the window.

To protect their wives and other diners, they threw themselves on to the grenade as it exploded and a blast rocked the restaurant.

A terrorism expert yesterday praised the men's "courage and professionalism" of the men, saying they reacted with speed and selflessness to prevent further tragedy when the device was thrown into the restaurant

on Saturday night. They were treated in hospital for multiple lacerations.

Their wives and the other Briton suffered minor wounds and shock to the attack, which was one of three in the capital which killed one woman and injured a total of 41 people.

A spokesman for the Foreign Office said the Britons were taken to the city's Black Lion Hospital, while their wives were treated for shock and less serious injuries at the British Embassy clinic. Yesterday they were in a stable condition.

Janet Duff, from the British Embassy, said: "Most of the injuries were due to flying glass and shrapnel, but we don't think anybody is in danger of losing their life. Obviously the injured are in a great amount of shock and emotional turmoil."

I think everyone here is very shocked and it will remain tense over the next few days," Ms Duff said there was no evidence

so far to suggest the men were deliberately targeted because they were training the police.

The Overseas Development Administration confirmed that the men were involved in a £4.9m police training project aimed at completely restructuring the Ethiopian force.

Terrorism expert Professor Paul Wilkinson, of St Andrew's University, said the valuable work of such training teams is often not appreciated by the public, adding: "These teams regularly go abroad and their record is excellent. Inevitably this work leads them into danger. This incident reveals the incredibly high calibre of some of the people involved."

The British Embassy said the men worked for private companies which help provide international training to people working in the public sector.

The Ethiopia scheme had been running for four years and was due to end this year.

Cosmos bytes into meaning of life

Mark Rowe

In Douglas Adams's book *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, a computer called Deep Thought concluded that the ultimate answer to the ultimate question of "Life, the Universe and Everything" was "42".

Now British scientists have devised their equivalent of Deep Thought - a £2m Silicon Graphics Origin 2000 computer called Cosmos.

Scientists in the Department of Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics at Cambridge University, say Cosmos will be able to answer fundamental questions about the universe. They hope the computer will help them model a history of the universe from the first fractions of a second after the Big Bang to the present day, about 10 billion years later.

Cosmos has 32 high performance R10000 processors and 8,000 megabytes of main memory. The project has been led by the physicist Professor Stephen Hawking, author of *A Brief History of Time*.

Professor Hawking, principal investigator of the UK Computational Cosmology Consortium, said: "The Cosmos computer will enable us to calculate what our theories of the early universe predict and test them against the new observational results that are now coming in."

Consortium members include scientists from the universities of Cardiff, Durham, Oxford, Sussex, Imperial College, London, and the Royal Observatory in Edinburgh.

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Schools take 3-year-olds over voucher cash

Judith Judd
Education Editor

Local authorities in Wales are lowering the school starting age to three, under pressure from the Nursery Voucher Scheme.

Some are offering new part-time places in reception classes to three-year-olds who are not eligible for voucher money, so that they can start recouping the money the moment a child

reaches four. The legal starting age is five.

The changes are controversial, because early-years experts say many reception classes do not have the staff or equipment to cater for very young children. Starting school too soon, they say, may put children off education for life.

Under the Government's scheme, all four-year-olds receive £1,100-a-year nursery vouchers from 1 April.

Private, voluntary and state nurseries have to compete for the money.

Early-years campaigners say they fear that the voucher scheme may force English local authorities to follow the Welsh example. Statistics from the Department for Education show there are already 1,416 three-year-olds in school reception classes.

The voucher scheme has led to a new school starting date of

just four rather than rising five, or five, in many parts of England, as local authorities try to maximise their voucher income.

In Wales, Geraint Ellis, Anglesey's Assistant Director of Education, said by September, 35 of the council's 51 primary schools would be admitting children part time after they reached their third birthday.

Mr Ellis said: "We need to recoup as much money from the voucher scheme as we can. We

are not happy about admitting children each term, so we are reducing the admission age by a full year."

All reception classes, he added, had a nursery assistant as well as a teacher and the number in a class would be limited. Nearby Gwynedd is also changing its admissions policy to admit children to school part-time at three.

Powys County Council is offering a full-time reception class place to rising fours from this term if schools have enough staff and equipment to cope with them. A spokesman for the council's education department said the change in admissions policy from the date that vouchers became available was "coincidental".

It followed a survey of heads who had mostly favoured the change. Those who felt children were too young to start school at three would continue to

admit them at four. Wendy Hawkins of the Wales Preschool Playgroups Association, said: "Teachers are bullying parents into sending children in school too early."

"These children are often put into inappropriate settings in small village schools in classes with a wide age range of children. Local authorities have panicked because they fear children will go elsewhere."

Welsh children have traditionally started school earlier than their English counterparts and there are already many rising fours in Welsh schools. Both countries have an earlier starting date than other western European countries.

Margaret Lochrie, of the Preschool Learning Alliance, said: "The legal age for starting school seems to mean very little. It is a concern to us that the early move into school won't stop at four."



Water blight: Around 61,000 litres of petrol have seeped into streams and rivers around the Welsh village of Bontddu.

Photographs: Steve Peake

Petrol leak puts villagers in fear

Ian Burrell

Families in a beautiful Welsh village on the edge of Snowdonia National Park have been evacuated from their homes after thousands of gallons of petrol were discovered in the ground beneath them.

A fireball has already ripped through two homes and parents are refusing to send children to the village school because they fear it is unsafe. The education authority has temporarily closed the school. Government officials are investigating how the explosion occurred and are trying to stop the petrol from seeping into streams and rivers.

It is estimated that 61,000 litres of petrol have leaked from an underground storage tank at the village petrol station in Bontddu, near Dolgellau.

Villagers say they are living in fear of further explosions. Four families have been moved out of their homes, rehoused by the local authority and told not to return until further notice.

One of those moved out of his house was David Collett, 43, who works as chef and manager at the Halfway House, the village pub. He said: "There was this small rumbling noise which grew louder and louder and the gable end of the house appeared to be moving. Then the cupboard door under the stairs flew open and a fireball flew out which ignited all the gases that were in the air in the house."

The fire was extinguished but the families do not know if there is any structural damage to their homes.

The Health and Safety Executive has been called in to co-

ordinate the investigation into the explosion, which took place earlier this month.

Brian Neale, of the HSE office in Wrexham, said the blast took place at the Government's Environment Agency was conducting a drilling operation to try and establish the full extent of the petrol leakage. The drilling led to complaints from villagers about the smell of petrol fumes pervading their houses.

The petrol spillage is believed to have first occurred in September, from an underground tank at the filling station, which is uphill from the school and cottages. The garage owner quickly reported the problem.

Eifys Llywd, the local Plaid Cymru MP, has called on the government agencies to act quickly to help the villagers return to a normal life.



Bontddu resident Raymond Roberts taking a water sample from the heavily polluted river near his abandoned home

Back to Victorian values for classroom desks and chairs

Glenda Cooper
Consumer Affairs Correspondent

The high chairs and sloping desks of the Victorian classroom have been largely abandoned, but osteopaths say their return could help prevent many back problems suffered by children.

As many as 25 per cent of children over 13 suffer back pain - nearly three-quarters of a million in total - it is claimed, with many of the problems due to bad posture and sitting for long periods during growth spurts.

In adults, the United Kingdom has one of Europe's worst problems with about 116 million working days lost to back-pain in 1994-95, compared with 59 million in 1988. The problem costs industry £500 a year and £480m in NHS resources.

Yet while tight legislation governs furniture-safety for adults, there are no such stringent tests for children and over the past two decades concern has been growing.

"Generally, the population is getting a lot taller so that immediately puts more stresses on to the lower back, particularly during growth spurts," Anne Redgrave, an orthopaedic doctor specialising in back pain, told the BBC programme *Watchdog*.

In America a study of 500 teenagers found that 56 per cent of the boys and 30 per cent of the girls were suffering from a degenerative spinal disease.

"We have seen a great increase in inquiries from parents even in the last 18 months," said Norma Mootague, of the National Back Pain Association. "Children can have problems which take years to develop."

"It makes me very cross that we're not actually trying to do something about a problem which is preventable," said Dr Redgrave. "If we were to change the furniture that these children were being forced to sit in... we could probably almost eliminate back pain for this group of children."

Ms Mootague added: "Plastic bucket seats encourage the spine to sit slumped in a 'C' shape, instead of the natural 'S' shape, which is not good news - and [the seats] are not adapted for different sizes. A little 11-year-old has to use the same desk as a thumping great 16-year-old."

Kids don't have their own desks; they move from department to department. We would thoroughly recommend that sloping desks be reintroduced."

Desks that are reinterpreting the Victorian style are now used by three out of four school-children in Denmark. The furniture has height-adjustable seats as well as desks and can be altered to suit the individual child.

David Newbound, who runs the Children's Seating Centre in London, and who also chairs the Back Pain Association's working party on children said: "These styles allow children to sit back

for listening as well as forward for writing and reading without damaging their spines. They recognise that children need to do both these things when they are sitting in classrooms."

But he added that prices may put them out of the range of most schools who usually spend between £15 and £30 on individual chairs and desks. The Scandinavian models cost £200 each. "We have found that they are probably too expensive for the UK market," said Mr Newbound. "I can't see any school buying them, although parents might want to buy them for their children at home."

But a cheaper alternative - a foam insert for existing bucket seats - is now being produced. The wedge of foam allows children to sit forward as well as back and means that they can also face sideways.

"Obviously the expensive models are the best but this is effective and would only add around £10-£12 to the price of the chair," said Mr Newbound.

Action is urgently needed, the Back Pain Association warns, otherwise we are storing up problems for the future. "We look after our children's teeth and make sure our children's shoes fit, but the spine remains out of sight and out of mind," said Ms Mootague. "We need to change this."

This issue is investigated by *Watchdog* HealthCheck at 7pm on BBC1 on Thursday.

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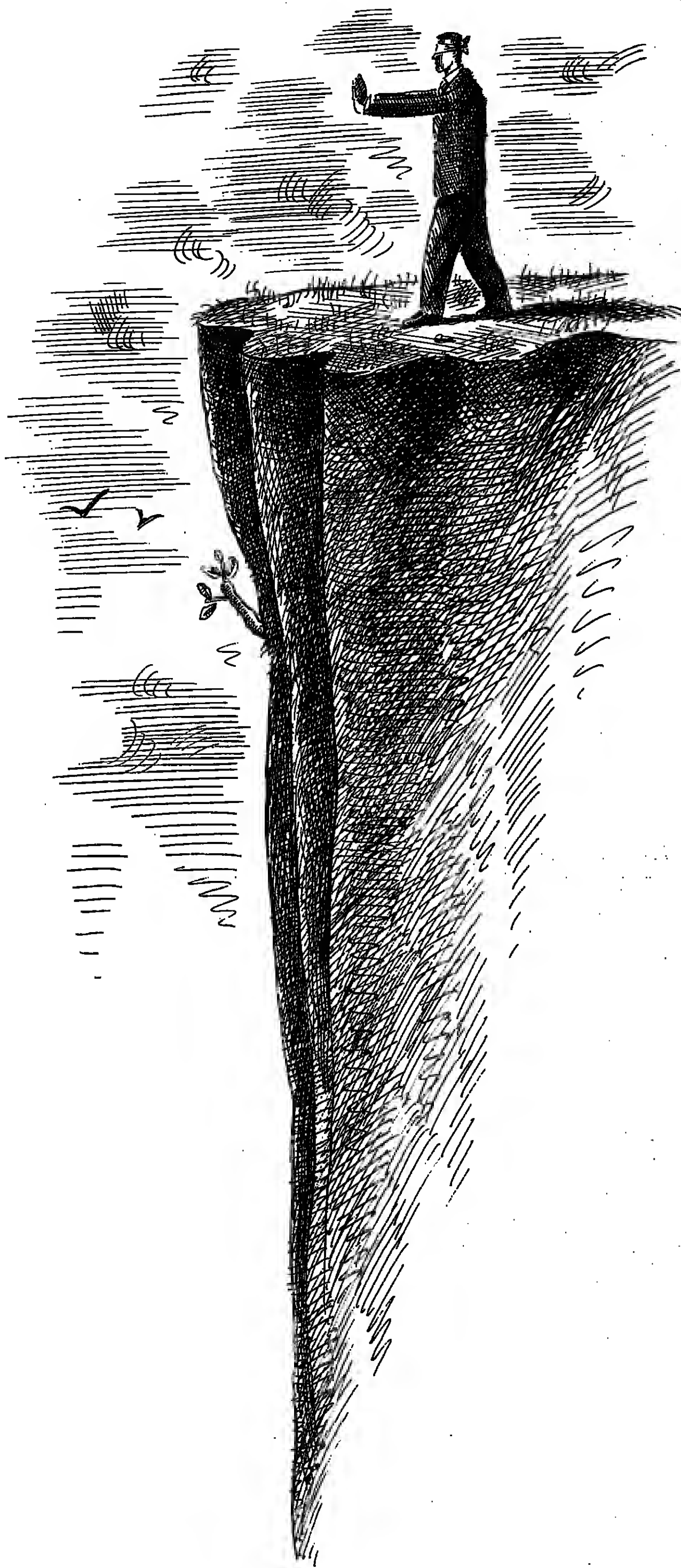
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High Street revolution: Bid to wipe out £1.4bn losses as businesses switch on to TV sales

National file puts shoplifters on display

Jason Bennett
Crime Correspondent

A national database of professional shoplifters, which includes photographs and personal details of offenders, is being set up throughout Britain.

The scheme is being pioneered by store owners, particularly Marks and Spencer, with the help of the police. The clampdown on persistent shop theft is prompted by losses to retailers of about £1.4bn last year. Customer theft accounted for nearly half the losses.

Stores and the police are now setting up a series of information databases around the country to help identify and target the most prolific convicted offenders. M&S have already recorded a list of their top 200 shop thieves and a national system is about to be put on trial in Scotland. Other schemes already operate in Norwich, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Shrewsbury, Stoke on Trent, Newcastle, and the Merry Hill shopping centre in the West Midlands.

A growing number of retailers are drawing up lists of persistent shoplifters. They obtain details of offenders from court cases and use police photographs and pictures taken by their own surveillance cameras. Each offender has their own file which, along with their photograph, contains information such as name, age, description and address.

The files are held by store detectives. The stores swap the

lists of their most troublesome customers with other retailers, building up a database of all the convicted shoplifters in the region. In some cases known offenders have been barred from shops.

So far M&S is one of the few chain stores to operate the scheme nationally, but a growing number of retailers are joining. In the next two months eight retailers - including C&A, BHS, ASDA, the Burton Group, the Sears Group, House of Fraser, and M&S - are due to start pilot schemes in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen.

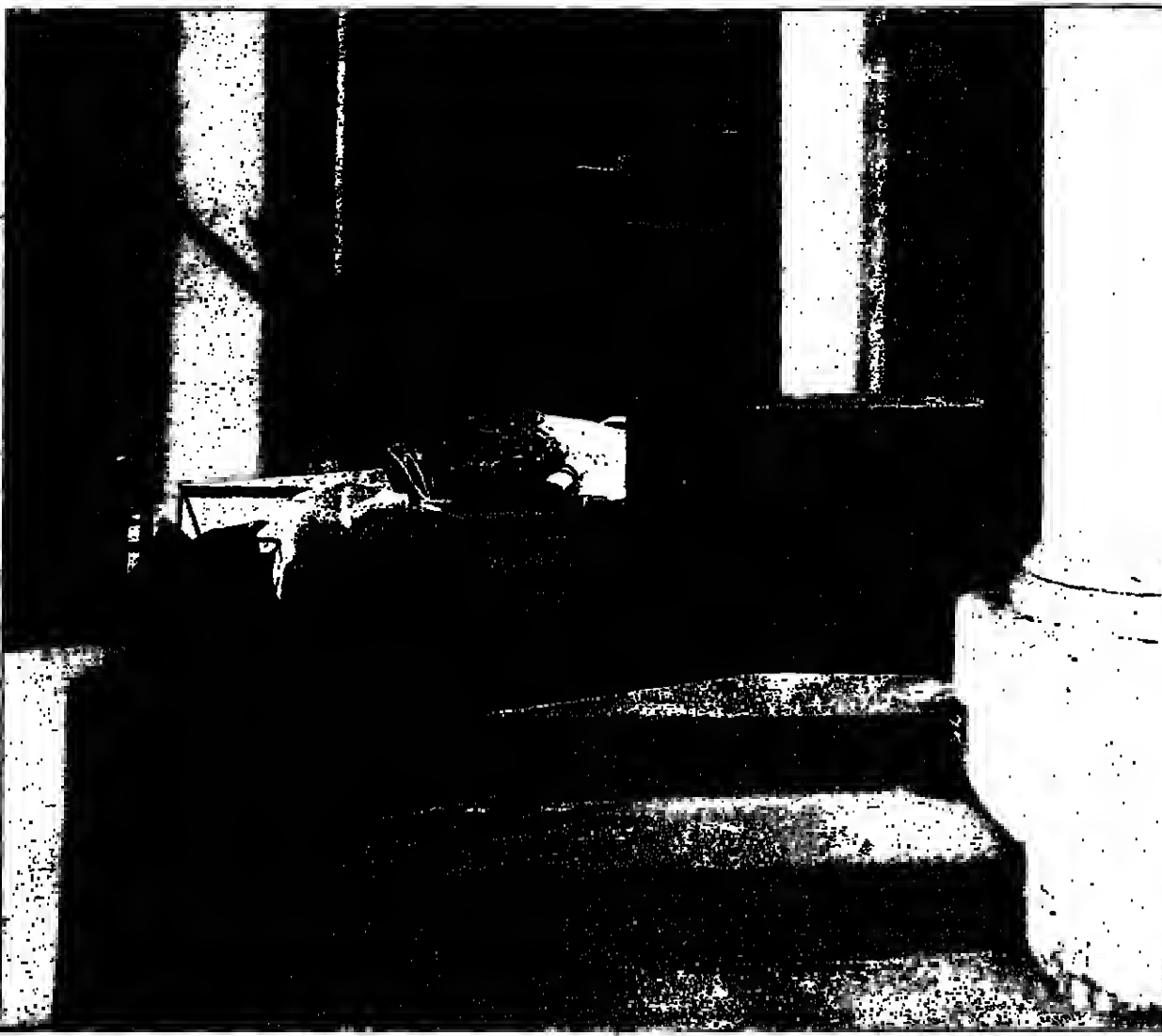
Each store contributes money to help pay for a central information bank to collate the information about repeat shoplifters. If the shared database is considered a success the stores plan to expand it to cover the whole of Scotland.

David Leigh, M&S project manager, in-store security department, said: "In the next six to nine months there will be an extensive network of schemes around the country [Britain]."

"I would like to see a central national database for shop theft. This could be expanded to include other types of offences such as cheque fraud."

"We are trying to be proactive about this problem which costs us millions of pounds. It's a partnership between retailers and the police, with the awareness of magistrates and the Crown Prosecution Service."

One of the latest police initiatives is Kettering police in Northamptonshire.



Doorstep delivery: More people are choosing to order goods without having to leave home

Photograph: Emma Boem

Stores home in on armchair shoppers

Simon Reeve

Home-shopping, trumpeted many times but never realised, is finally taking off.

With very little advertising or marketing, the home-shopping television channel QVC is attracting 30,000 new customers every month. From this week, shoppers will be able to buy toothpaste and shampoo without leaving their armchairs as Boots becomes the first high street retailer to sell via interactive television.

Safeway has just announced that it is to launch a new type

of home-shopping service to appeal to the more than 20 million home-shoppers who now spend nearly £10bn each year.

The number of retailers offering the convenience of shopping from home will triple by 2000, according to Deloitte & Touche, the accountants, as consumer visionaries use the Internet, catalogues and television to build an all-encompassing web with which they can maximise their sales and drain us all of money.

Their targets are not only those too lazy or intimidated to brave a shopping centre, but

high-spending professionals who are too busy to stand in a queue, or lug bags of shopping to and from their cars. These customers are among the 4.5 million who have already opted for one of the most popular developments of the home-shopping era: telephone banking, operated by companies such as First Direct.

In the supermarkets, rather than pushing a trolley around a store, Safeway customers who hold a loyalty card will soon be able to pre-order their everyday household goods by phone or fax. The Collect & Go scheme in-

volves giving customers a ready-made personalised shopping list which will be updated weekly as well as a catalogue featuring more than 3,000 top-selling household and grocery goods.

Some gurus of the retail industry believe that within a few years home-shopping could be in a position to rival the more traditional high street or superstore. Their claims have been boosted by the news that Marks & Spencer will introduce a catalogue by next spring, through which M&S hopes to achieve sales estimated at £500m within three years.

Dry spell hits rarest spider

Persistent dry weather is thought to be threatening the existence of Britain's rarest spider, writes Mark Rowe.

One of the last two refuges of the great raft spider is the Redgrave and Lopham Fen in East Anglia, home to a rich variety of wildlife including fewer than 100 of the rare arachnids.

Suffolk Wildlife Trust officials say that too much water has been extracted from the fen - which is irrigated by a natural borehole - for use by the public and farmers.

Now that supplies in the region are low, the moisture on which the spider depends is drying up. Conservationists have started pumping emergency supplies of water into the fen, near Diss in Norfolk, in the hope of improving conditions. The spider's only other habitat is at Pevensey in East Sussex.

Trust assistant director Julian Roughton said: "We are pumping water into their pools to help



At risk: The great raft spider

them out. I suspect that without that they would not survive. They are surviving, but that's about all they are doing."

The European Union is backing a £3m project which aims to revitalise Redgrave and Lopham Fen by re-siting a borehole by the Essex and Suffolk water company. EU officials hope that, if successful, the project can be repeated at other threatened wetland sites in Europe. However, the Suffolk Wildlife Trust fears that it may come too late for its particular colony.

DAILY POEM

Rush-hour Traffic

By Hans Magnus Enzensberger
(translated by Michael Hamburger)

In all congested areas
bodies wander about
with something to do.
Behind the thinker's brow
revolutionising plans.
They concern election lists,
extra-marital opportunities,
tanteu shops.

No time, with the best will in the world,
like ancestors or ghosts
who need no upkeep
and no conversation
apart from intentions
to hover

or only to
roll themselves up
like that cat
on the carpet
unimportantly given up
to the unfathomably breathing
calm metabolic process.

This poem comes from Hans Magnus Enzensberger's latest collection, *Kiosk*, which is published this week by Bloodaxe Books (£7.95). Bloodaxe also publishes a German-English bilingual edition of Enzensberger's *Selected Poems*.

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election '97

Tories target Prescott over minimum pay

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

John Prescott was targeted by the Tory leadership last night after off-the-record remarks on the minimum wage which Brian Mawhinney, the Conservative Party chairman, claimed marked a "defining moment" in the general election campaign.

The attack on the Labour deputy leader will be used by the Tory leadership to keep Labour on the defensive for the second successive week of the campaign.

Dr Mawhinney said the minimum wage was part of Labour's "secret deal" with the unions which the party would push through the Commons "in cold blood" even though it knew people would suffer unemployment as a result.

That allegation was denied by Mr Prescott and the Labour leadership, but the Tories will use the unemployment figures on Wednesday to attack the central plank of Labour's campaign platform of reducing unemployment with the proceeds of the windfall profits tax on the privatised utilities.

"This is a defining moment, because it shows that on its central policy of reducing unemployment, Labour is shut out of holes," said a Tory source.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Michael Heseltine, widened

the attack by claiming that the Scottish TUC agenda revealed that Labour was under renewed pressure to give way to union demands on a minimum wage of £4.50 an hour, an end to public sector pay freezes, more job protection and the right to strike in secondary action.

The Tory big guns were trained on Mr Prescott after a report in the *Sunday Times* by AA Gill, under a headline describing him as a "loose cannon", that the deputy Labour leader had said off-the-record that the minimum wage would increase unemployment.

"He gave the hypothetical example of a nursery school that paid four workers £2 an hour and was then made to pay them £4. They might have to sack two of them. But he couldn't say that. Think what the Tories would make of it."

None of Mr Prescott's alleged remarks was in direct quotes, and the deputy leader fired off an angry letter accusing the reporter of "selectively omitting from his report that we were talking about a situation that existed five years ago... As I made clear to Mr Gill and as I have said on many occasions, whilst in 1992 I was concerned about the effects of the minimum wage, evidence published since then has proved those fears to be groundless."

The Tories have used Mr

Prescott's 1992 remarks about the minimum wage earlier in this campaign but yesterday called a special press conference in London to exploit what it believes is a vulnerable flank for Labour.

"If we can show that the Labour Party would increase unemployment, it destroys their key argument that they would reduce unemployment by the windfall tax," said the Tory source.

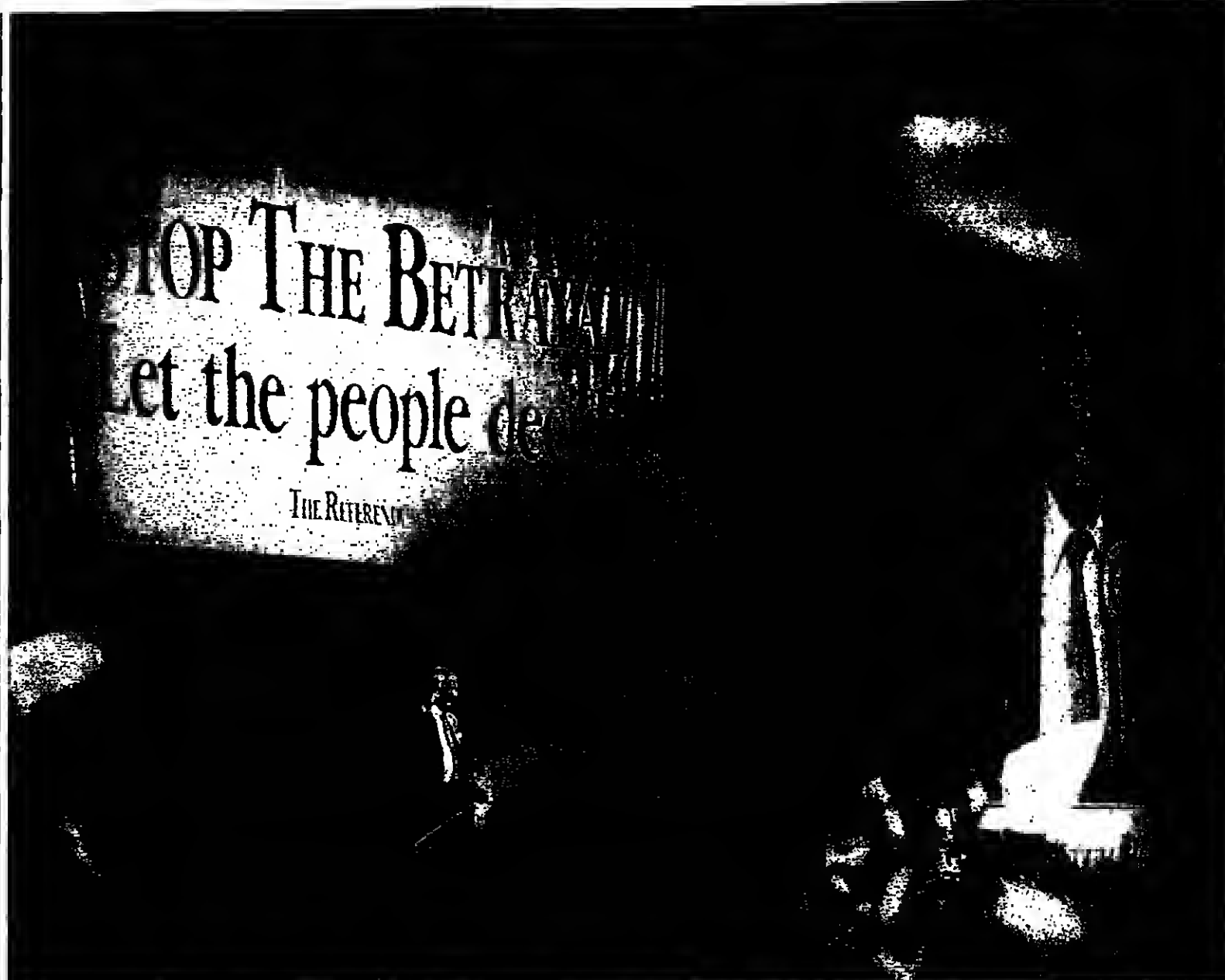
Dr Mawhinney declared: "There is a defining moment in every general election campaign. This is that moment. This election is about trust. The revelation today... is the starkest possible evidence that you cannot trust a word new Labour say."

Stephen Dorrell, the Secretary of State for Health, said Labour "tell the truth in private and tell lies in public".

Mr Heseltine said: "With less than three weeks to the election, the union bosses are flexing their muscles and spelling out the pay-back they want for bankrolling Labour's election effort."

In Lang, President of the Board of Trade, said: "Tory Blair's protestations that he can be tough on the unions are laughable."

The deal has already been struck. There would be no stopping them."



Revivalist spirit: Sir James Goldsmith is cheered by the party faithful at a rally at Alexandra Palace in London yesterday. Photograph: Edward Sykes

Faithful hear gospel of Sir James

Claire Garner

Prayers, song and dance enliven Referendum Party rally

Revivalist fervour was in the air at the Referendum Party's rally at Alexandra Palace yesterday. Replete with gospel music, moving testimonies from recent converts, dancing in the aisles, and prayers, the family service marking the Third Sunday before Election attracted a congregation of 10,000.

The high priest was, of course, Sir James Goldsmith. But it was the visiting preacher, Reverend George Hargreaves, who rallied the "rabble army" to its feet. "I wanna give you a song," boomed the black preacher. "You know the lyrics, they're very simple. Let the people decide... Let's sing it out loud."

Let's sing it proud... we want our God-given right to decide."

Sir James' wife, Lady Annabel, wearing a sumptuous floral print that subtly picked up the venison red in the flag, sang along with her sons Zak and Benjamin - although less comfortably. For the most part, however, it was out a titled occasion. Plain folk from across the country had travelled hundreds of miles in coaches laid on by the Party. Robin Page, television presenter of *One Man and His Dog* and chairman of the Countryside Restoration Trust, was looking every bit the farmer. He joked: "The odd thing is

[the media] say that the Referendum Party is for the rich and famous. Where are you? Stand up. I can't see any fur. I can't see any pearls. Most of you seem to be as rough as I am. Wait till you've seen David Bellamy. He's even rougher."

Besides Mr Bellamy, the ecologist who is standing against John Major, speakers included Lord McAlpine, former Tory party treasurer, zoo owner John Aspinall, actor Edward Fox and the titled Sir George Gardiner, right-wing Tory descended by Reigate Tories. They spoke of the birthright of Britons, of "the silent teaching

of our ancient liberties," the nation's capacity for "instant arousal and cohesion when faced by a naked threat."

International television broadcast the event around the world. The degree of coverage at home however, was unlikely to match it. As Mr Page said bitterly: "I'll find out whether it is a Referendum Party rally at 6 o'clock. I'll see if there's any mention of this in the news. If we're not on, I'll know it's a Referendum Party rally."

By the end of the afternoon, everyone present was fired up by Sir James. All but the media. Edwin Roth, who works for Ra-

dio Uno, in Austria, said the "rampant, xenophobic populism" brought to mind *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* by Goethe. He said: "Oh, Master, I'm terrible trouble because the genius I called I can't get rid of. The most appalling populist show ever seen in London."

Sir James blessed the party faithful and then went walkabout, Pope-in-St-Peter's-Square style. Mingling with his flock to the soundtrack of *The Mission*, the millionaire financier embraced his "friends". Some reached out to touch him, others thrust out service sheets in the hope of a signature. Yet more held their cameras aloft, in an effort to capture the historic moment on film.

Managers swing towards Major

Michael Harrison

Support for the Conservatives has picked up among Britain's managers in the last week despite Labour's high-profile launch of a manifesto aimed directly at business.

According to the latest poll from the Institute of Management, backing for the Tories is up from 41 per cent in the week before Easter to 43 per cent. Labour remains steady on 34 per cent, while the Liberal Democrat's polled 20 per cent - up three points.

More than half of those - 55 per cent - feared that Labour's proposals for statutory recognition of trade unions would increase the likelihood of industrial action. Seven in ten managers said it was better to communicate with staff directly than through unions, although 87 per cent said employees should have the right to join a trade union.

However, the poll also contained some unwelcome news for the Conservatives. Their

support among managers has dropped by 19 points since the last election and 49 per cent of those polled in the latest survey believed it was time for a change of government.

Just under half - 47 per cent - said the Tories had lost touch with the real needs of business, while 48 per cent said they did not believe a change of government would damage their business.

The Tories still scored better on the economy, with 60 per cent approving of their economic management compared with 43 per cent saying they would trust Labour to run the economy competently.

But there was concern among more than a third of managers that the current boom - the focus of the Conservatives' election advertising campaign - would be followed by bust.

Despite the pick-up in Tory support, Margaret Beckett, Labour's trade and industry spokeswoman, seized on the poll, saying: "The business

community has become increasingly concerned with the division and incompetence of the Conservatives and they have become increasingly interested in hearing the real truth about Labour's approach and policies. The Institute of Management survey shows that the more managers hear from us, the less they are taken in by the Tory propaganda machine."

Roger Young, the Institute's director-general, said: "Managers seem in a mood to change and will swing behind the party that is most in tune with the business agenda."

Some discordant notes are sounding on the current consumer boom and a possible rise in inflation. Managers want to hear the right noises on the key issues of economic management."

The poll was conducted among Institute of Management members by Quick Reaction Survey during the last week. Of those contacted, 349 replied - a 49 per cent response rate.

Labour's plans for schools unveiled

Judith Judd
Education Editor

A network of inner city specialist schools sharing resources with a nearby "family" of schools will be announced today by Tony Blair.

Labour is playing down the issue of how specialist schools will select their pupils. Instead, in a speech at Birmingham University, Mr Blair will emphasise that his party is interested in standards, not structures or selection.

But parents' groups yesterday said the plans to increase the number of schools specialising in technology, modern languages, sport or arts could lead to unfair selection of pupils. They are concerned that Labour is so nervous about opposing the Conservative coalition of parental choice that it will fail to tackle the central question of school admissions.

They say the Conservative policy of promoting different types of schools, including 150 specialist schools, has led to chaos in places such as Bromley where all schools have agreed to select 15 per cent of their pupils.

The Conservatives promised

in their manifesto that a fifth of secondary schools (around 900) would become specialist in five years. Schools receive a grant from the Government and have to raise an equivalent amount from private sources. Mr Blair will reveal that Labour will use the money already pledged by the Conservatives for specialist schools to create 300 over the next four years. He will attack the Conservatives' programme as unplanned and incoherent and promise instead to target money for specialist schools, mainly in technology and modern languages, at the inner cities.

Specialist schools will be expected to share their expertise with neighbouring schools. They will not be given money for new technology equipment unless they agree to make it available to others. Computer programmes developed in inner city schools will be available to rural schools. Language schools will have to offer teaching to pupils from nearby schools where the choice of languages is restricted.

Labour sources said yesterday the issue of selection to specialist schools would become "irrelevant" because of schools' co-operation. However, they made it clear that the 1993 Government guidelines on admissions which allow schools to select up to 10 per cent of their pupils on aptitude without consulting the Secretary of State for Education, would remain.

Margaret Tulloch of the Campaign for State Education, a parents' pressure group, said: "Most parents want their child to go to a local school. If a child is excluded because he does not meet the criterion for the local school's specialism, then that would be unfair. Labour needs to work out a new national admissions policy, not just one that would work in north London."

Twenty per cent of parents fail to get the school of their choice. In London the figure is half.

Mr Blair will also outline proposals for a General Teaching Council to improve recruitment to the profession and to deal with incompetent teachers. Comprehensive schools, he will argue, need to be more flexible and offer fast-tracking to the ablest pupils. On higher education, he will repeat the commitment to ensure students repay their living costs, but not their tuition fees.

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Blair stresses his devotion to devolution

Fran Abrams
Political Correspondent

Tony Blair stressed his commitment to Scottish devolution yesterday and insisted that there would be no tax-raising constraints on a Scottish Parliament set up by a Labour government.

Mr Blair said on a Scottish radio phone-in programme that there was no inconsistency in his party's plans, and promised that ultimate sovereignty would remain at Westminster.

It was his first interview north of the border since launching Labour's manifesto for Scotland 10 days ago and likening a Scottish parliament's powers to those of an English parish council.

Speaking from a studio in London, he told Radio Clyde: "Devolution is not separatism. It is not federation. It is devolving certain specific powers over the running of public services and the making of the laws regarding them, to the Scottish Parliament."

Mr Blair said the most important thing was to recognise that the establishment and sur-

vival of a Scottish Parliament rested on the goodwill and support of the Scottish people.

It was necessary to keep an eye on the big picture, he said, adding that only Labour could deliver a Scottish Parliament.

The Parliament would have the power to decide the issues which it had control over and could not be dictated to by Westminster on those issues. It would have the power to raise taxes, if the people voted for it, but Labour had made a commitment not to raise the basic or top rates of income tax for five years, he added.

Labour's shadow Scottish secretary, George Robertson, had said the Scottish Labour Party were committed to keeping to the English party's promise to keep to the Conservatives' tax plans, he said.

"This idea that I sort of enforce everything on everybody, I mean, the Scottish Labour party has been part of the process of developing the manifesto for the UK. They say, in the Scottish manifesto, we are not going to raise the basic or top rate of income tax."

BBC election coverage attacked as 'too fair'

Steve Boggan

Labour launched an attack on the media coverage of the election campaign yesterday, saying the BBC was being "too fair" in allowing politicians to make negative jibes at each other.

Launching the party's latest poster campaign, John Blair said he wanted the campaign to concentrate on issues rather than "in-fur-tat" politics. His press secretary, Alastair Campbell, went further by holding tele-

vision coverage of the campaign responsible for voter apathy.

He said he was not making a gratuitous attack on the BBC, but criticised the corporation's interpretation of the Representation of the People Act and its own charter, which say broadcasts should give parties an equitable amount of airtime. He said that was resulting mainly in coverage of Tory criticism of Labour and of Labour rebuttals. "People want to hear about the issues," he said. "Not just

one set of politicians knocking another set."

"Tony Blair feels very strongly that we have to start gripping the ock and shaking people out of media-inspired cynicism. We do that by Tony being positive, positive, positive, every time the Tories are negative, negative, negative."

"Labour believes the Conservatives are running a negative campaign in the hope that people will feel cynical towards

all politicians, a condition more likely to result in political status quo."

Addressing a BBC correspondent at a media briefing in Milton Keynes after the launch of Labour's posters, Mr Campbell said the party would prefer to see separate news packages examining Conservative policies and the Labour plans. "We don't even mind if you give them more time than us - we are not stop-watch crazy," he said.

The positive campaigning theme was also taken up by Mr Blair. "They tell me that ratings for the television news programmes are on the slide," he said. "It is not surprising. You switch on your oves every night and it's tit for tat - they knock us and we knock them. It should be about things that really concern the people of this country."

He said the launch of the posters was Labour's attempt to highlight positive issues. Using the same fluorescent green, yellow and blue backgrounds that

have characterised its campaign, the posters carry the party's five main election pledges.

Labour plans to devote today to another of its positive themes: education. Addressing his Milton Keynes audience, where the party needs a 4.6 per cent swing to take the seat from the Conservatives Mr Blair said: "I don't believe there is any more important issue for the future of this country... my first three priorities are education, education and education."



The Independent is on the World Wide Web at last, with a general election web site run jointly with Virgin.

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To join us, key in the following location: <http://www.virgin.net/independent97/>

Backroom army plots to outflank Paddy

Dimbleby team's attack calculated to expose Captain Ashdown's weaknesses

Paul McCann
Media Correspondent

Paddy Ashdown emerged from his first long interview of the campaign yesterday and described his brain as "mush" after a grilling on the Jonathan Dimbleby programme.

It is hardly surprising. In cramped offices with newspaper headlines generated by the programme hung like trophies on the wall, Dimbleby and his team of researchers prepare for head-to-head interviews like a team of lawyers preparing a barrister for court battle.

For two weeks before Mr Ashdown entered London Weekend Television's studio they have been crawling over his speeches, policy statements, party manifesto and interviews.

But the first part of their battle is to get an interviewee at all. Alex Gardiner, the deputy editor, spends much of his time on the phone to spin doctors trying to "sell ice cubes to Eskimos", as he puts it.

Mr Gardiner sells Mr Dimbleby's two million audience and its status in Westminster as a proving ground for good performers, but it is getting harder. "Frost has been poisoning the well for all of us," said Edward Morgan, editor of the Dimbleby show. "Why should they do us if they can have an easy time on Frost?"

Many who come on Mr Dimbleby's two-year-old programme just try not to make a gaffe. Robin Cook and Malcolm Rifkind are favoured guests because they actually enjoy the cut and thrust of an argument.

The week before the show Mr Dimbleby's team decide on an overall theme for the interview. Yesterday it was to test the impression Mr Ashdown gives of being a non-politician - of being the honest broker.

Mr Dimbleby does not negotiate the subject of the interviews. But he does undertake to ambush a guest by discussing something out of their



Talk shop: Jonathan Dimbleby preparing for his interview with the Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown (right). Photograph: Edward Sykes

remit, otherwise they don't come back.

The day before the show Mr Dimbleby takes on three of his staff who role-play Mr Ashdown, trying to guess his responses. To one question producer Andy Harrison makes a good stab at the 'Ashdown anecdote': "I recently met a woman...". And true to form during the interview the Lib-Dem leader brings up a woman he met in Wirral to illustrate his point on tactical voting.

The role-play spent a lot of its time on how the Lib-Dem's 1p in the pound tax for education might be guaranteed to go to education. The programme's researchers had quotes from Charles Kennedy and others

saying they believed in local democracy and the money would actually go where local authorities wanted it to - like care for the elderly.

Mr Ashdown denied this hotly and accused Mr Dimbleby of having poor researchers - instead of dragging in the audit commission as Mr Dimbleby had been briefed to expect, Mr Ashdown claimed an undertaking in the manifesto for a Lib-Dem government to force new money to be spent on education.

In the director's gallery a junior researcher was sent scurrying back to the production offices to find a copy of the manifesto to check this out.

Like all interviewers Mr

Dimbleby uses an ear piece, mainly so the director can tell him how much time is left. His predecessor in ITV's Sunday political slot, Brian Walden, used his ear piece to allow researchers to feed him questions. But by the time the manifesto arrives it is too late to brief Mr Dimbleby anyway, the show approaches its commercial break and the audience gets ready to ask questions.

"You see, I wrote our manifesto," says Mr Ashdown afterwards. "I spent 70 hours writing it and I know where the skeletons are hidden."

In the final analysis even Jonathan Dimbleby and his team haven't spent as long studying Ashdown as Ashdown has.



Tories get tough with EU fishermen

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

The Prime Minister will today harden the Tories' policy on Europe by warning European partners that he will block the intergovernmental conference unless a deal is reached to stop EU fishing fleets plundering British fish stocks.

Tony Baldry, the fisheries minister, will warn his European counterparts that Britain will block progress unless agreement is reached to stop other fleets, led by the Spanish, from using quotas purchased from British trawler owners to take more of the British catch.

John Major will reinforce his readiness to veto progress on the IGC unless there is a deal to stop so-called "quota-hopping" when he visits a fishing port in the West Country today. The sabre rattling follows the defeat for Britain in the European Court of Justice to ban quota-hopping.

Conservative Party strategists believe a stand on fisheries policy at the IGC in Amsterdam in June will help to fight off the Liberal Democrat challenge for key marginal Tory seats in the South West, and will also provide a weapon to attack both Paddy Ashdown and Tony Blair. Mr Major is making a virtue of his readiness to be isolated in Europe in his election campaign.

The tougher line was emphasised last night by Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind who said: "The IGC will not come to a successful conclusion unless we are satisfied that among our other objectives the problem of quota-hopping is resolved satisfactorily."

The threat to hold up progress at the IGC until a deal on quota-hopping was reached was seen as a gaffe by the Labour Party and caught out the Tories' own research department. Michael Portillo, a leading Euro-sceptic in the Cabinet, said on Channel Four's *A Week in Politics*: "Our partners must expect that we will go to that conference prepared to veto unless we get a change on quota-hopping."

A Tory briefing note was sent to Mr Portillo and leaked to Labour saying: "Contrary to the impression given on *Week in Politics* (it is) not Government policy to block the IGC if no agreement on quota-hopping."

But senior Tory sources confirmed last night that it was now Tory policy to veto progress, and that Mr Portillo had anticipated the hardening of the approach. "The briefing note was sent by a very junior researcher," said the Tory source.

Mr Baldry said at the weekend: "We have made it clear that a solution on quota-hopping has to be found before we will allow the IGC to conclude."

"I am going to Luxembourg to negotiate the best deal for the future of the British fishing industry and stand up for our interests in Europe. This is something Labour are incapable of doing. Robin Cook has made it clear that Labour would not be prepared to veto the IGC over a key issue like quota-hopping."

The hardening of the Government's policy will be welcomed by Euro-sceptic Tory candidates who have been given carte blanche by the Tory leadership to fight the election on personal manifestos ruling out the single European currency.



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Mandelson breaks rules to boast victory for Labour

Fran Abrams
Political Correspondent

Peter Mandelson broke the politicians' cardinal rule yesterday when he used opinion-poll evidence to back claims that Labour was heading for victory.

In a rare public statement, the party's campaign manager took a risk that no leading figure has yet taken during this election. In promoting the importance of the current, positive opinion polls, he left his party exposed on the issue of what to say when they are negative. The usual line is that the only poll that matters is the one on 1 May.

"Labour is in an exception-

ally strong position. We are not only broadly maintaining our lead in the polls but, more interestingly, we are consolidating our position in the real election campaign.

"A poll last week revealed that 84 per cent identify with Labour's message that 'Britain Deserves Better'. Only 8 per cent believe that 'Britain is Booming'." Mr Mandelson said. With weekend polls putting Labour's lead at between 16 and 20 per cent, pollsters' predictions that the gap between the parties would narrow gradually appear to be being borne out.

One leading pundit said in a television interview yesterday

that on current predictions Labour can expect to have a 9 point lead over the Conservatives on polling day - enough to give the party an overall majority of 145.

While the Conservatives take comfort from the fact that the polls got it wrong in 1992, and from the fact that their share of the vote has grown in the past few weeks, few commentators believe they can make up the difference in the time left.

Bob Worcester, chairman of MORI, said on the BBC's *Breakfast with Frost* programme yesterday that the Tories' share had risen from 29 per cent to 32 per cent since the campaign be-

gan. If that continued, by polling day Labour would have 44 per cent of the vote, the Conservatives 35 per cent and the Liberal Democrats 13 per cent.

However, he added that he did not believe this would happen. "I think it will be more narrow than that, as the public focus on whether they want a majority the size of Mrs Thatcher's," he said.

Labour's lead throughout this election campaign has been higher than in previous years. In 1987, the Tories were between 4 and 14 points ahead and eventually won with an 11.8 per cent lead. In 1992, the polls varied between a 5 per cent lead for the

Conservatives and a 6 per cent lead for Labour, but the Tories won with a 7.6 per cent lead.

This time, with the polls adjusted to take into account their bias towards Labour in 1992, the lowest Labour lead so far has been 12 points, and the highest 27. Even a 12-point lead would end in a landslide bigger than the one in 1945, when Labour had a majority of 146.

David Cowling, a political analyst with Harris, said: "It was always likely that the gap would narrow... and the polls seem to be supporting this."

"It is equally unlikely that the gap would narrow sufficiently to save the Conservatives."

by Anonymous

They weren't exactly gloomy in the back of the red Jag, but they weren't ecstatic either.

"Authenticity, authenticity, authenticity," said Big Al. "They think we're too packaged, too afraid, too delicate to take risks."

He broke off. "Where are we now?" He scratched his long nose and squinted at the big, blue road sign ahead. "Million Keynes 14 miles. What a way to spend Sunday," he sighed. "So we have to look as though we're up for it, as if we have balls of steel and eat whole oxen raw for breakfast. As if they're seeing right through to the passionate, truthful kid inside."

In the front seat the woman they call the Queen Mum oodled. The Queen Mum had known the Candidate since she was a 15-year-old rebellious schoolgirl. Now she had turned 40, but in the quarter-century since they first met at college she had never really had any doubts about him. It was an enthusiasm that she shared with the other mums - all mature women with kids - who organised the Candidate's campaign. In any shot of the Candidate working a crowd, the Queen Mum would be there shepherding him through it all - the short jacket showing off her ummatron-like figure, her blonde hair framing a wide mouth and a large, determined jaw.

"It's just a matter of letting them feel they've encountered the real thing," she said reassuringly. "It's our fault really. We've been so anxious that it should go smoothly and that the hacks get their maps and shots, and that we should stay on message, we've made it all seem a bit unspontaneous, and that's rubbed off a tiny bit on you." She looked at the Candidate nervously.

He smiled ruefully. "You know," he said, patting the Sunday newspaper on the seat beside him. "They hate me, you know, they hate me. They really do - the people who ought to be on our side. Look at this." He picks the paper up. "They got together a professor, a solicitor, a barrister, a charity man, a head teacher, you know like that Dinner Party programme - except in Islington. And what do they all agree about, over the Rioja and tuna? They hate me!"

Big Al growled. "What do you expect? You remind them that they've been wrong most of their adult lives, and they don't like it. They've spent years telling their mates that, of course,

the voters would pay extra taxes for better services, that crime was all about poverty, etcetera. Now you come along and say 'We don't have to do it that way', and they cannot bear it. They'd rather be out of power, able to wear some poxy little badge saying 'doo! blame me, I voted Labour'. It's the way they've lived for 20 years."

"Al's quite right," Queen Mum broke in. "Down in my bit of Sussex you won't hear much whingeing about betrayal, unless it's the Grey Man they're talking about. Changing the subject, can we talk about this poster launch, for a moment? We get to MK, and there's a little clearing just outside the National Hockey Centre. Pascal has organised for the five ad lorries to be in a semi-circle. When you come to each of the Five Pledges in your speech, someone representing the Pledge in question will unveil the relevant poster."

"I have a terrible feeling I know what's coming next," said the Candidate, resignedly. "First we'll do the tax pledge and two perfect MK families - mum, dad and two kids - will pull the cords, and the lorry will probably keel over. Correct?"

"Except for the lorry, yes. Unless there's a high wind."

"Theo class sizes and seven photogenic kiddies will reveal that one - right?"

"Right."

"Health service - three uniformed nurses, an orderly, a physician complete with stethoscope and a warm-looking GP?"

"No stethoscope."

"Jobs for young people; that's easy. Two suitable teenaged job-seekers. Hold on, though," he frowned, narrowing his eyes. "What about juvenile crime? Two young muggers with Mohicans and nose rings who want to be jailed quickly? A pair of prison officers?"

"Six pensioners," said Al. "The kind of people who most feel juvenile crime. One has two walking sticks, and the biddies look great apparently."

The Candidate sighed. But Al went on. "There's more. Right at the end, when you're getting to your rousing climax, they'll all come forward and surround you on the podium. It'll make a terrific picture."

"Very authentic," said the Candidate. "Now do I go with my jacket on, or is it shirt sleeves again?"

"Shirt sleeves," said Big Al and the Queen Mum together.

In Sussex you won't hear much whingeing about betrayal, unless it's the Grey Man they're talking about.

THIS WEDNESDAY IN

THE INDEPENDENT

YOUR ELECTION SPECIAL

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THE INDEPENDENT
IT IS...ARE YOU?

Diane Coyle
Economics Editor

Birmingham celebrated the Sixties at the weekend with a series of special tours of its modern architectural heritage - and the event was not without a certain irony. For the celebration came less than two weeks after developers got the go-ahead for a major refurbishment of the city's infamous centrepiece - the 1960s Bull Ring - aimed at breathing new life into Birmingham's commercial heart.

The £300m Bull Ring project is one of several developments, mostly privately funded, that will pump about £1bn into the city during the next few years. Local businessmen and politicians are confident that the investment, along with a steady flow of big conventions like the 1998 G7 summit, will see Birmingham through the next recession with less pain than could otherwise have been expected.

Birmingham has done better than the country's other big courtyards in creating jobs in the face of declining traditional industries, according to the Business Strategies consultancy. But in a city where unemployment is twice the national average, and six wards have a

rate three times the average, there is no complacency about economic prospects. There is, even so, a sense that if Labour wins the election it will bring the first chance for two decades for Birmingham to grab back from central government more say over its own future.

Discussion within the party about the merits of elected mayors have excited hopes that there is a real prospect of the devolution of powers under a Labour government, even though Tony Blair has said only that he is minded to create such a post in London.

In fact, Birmingham's chief executive, Michael Lyons, and council leader, Theresa Stewart, a Labour stalwart, are opposed to the notion of an elected mayor. "It gives you Action Man government," says Mr

Lyons, who argues that modern cities are too diverse and full of conflicts for a strong, chairman-of-the-board model of leadership to work. Indeed, he is cautious about what a Labour government would deliver at all. "Labour has historically been a very centralist party, and it would not be in a position to release us from tight financial controls," he says.

But like a wide range of civic leaders in Birmingham, he is a strong advocate of seeing more financial decisions made by the city for the city. Two areas crop up repeatedly: the city's physical infrastructure and planning.

Tony Bradley, director of policy at the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, says: "We could form a tremendously successful city region." But one obstacle is the lack of invest-

ment in infrastructure, especially transport. This is not a finance problem. Private funds are available, although the introduction of the private finance initiative did slow some projects down. It is a decision-making problem. "Transport projects need more local decisions. The time-scale is 15 or 20 years, and you have to get them through three or four terms of office of central government," says Mr Bradley.

Birmingham is waiting for the new government to give its verdict on the northern relief road, intended to reduce congestion on the M6. The decision, due in November, has been delayed by the general election. So has a verdict on the plan for a huge Korean inward investment project on a greenfield council site at Peddymore,

strongly opposed by Sir Norman Fowler, the Tory MP for Sutton Coldfield.

The second aspect of the desire for more local power also arises from frustration with the slow pace of Whitehall decisions. Businessman and city councillor John Henning, the Liberal Democrat candidate for Birmingham Yardley, says: "The only way you could do anything sensible is through local pilot schemes. Whitehall is very good at making big mistakes. It has to be willing to allow cities to experiment." On his wish list for the next government, Mr Lyons puts freedom from unnecessary central restrictions, better co-ordination between central government departments and, above all, the ability to raise more revenue locally.

"Less than 15 per cent of tax is being raised locally, which is untenable in terms of democracy," he says.

He gives the example of Birmingham's National Exhibition Centre and Convention Centre. The former makes a profit and both will be profitable by 2004, but the council is still paying a £15m subsidy this year. "Councils do need an ability to underwrite this sort of project. You have to be able to raise some money locally," he argues

Devolutionary talk as Second City seeks say in financial future

Sixties style: The Birmingham Rotunda - centrepiece of the city's much derided Bull Ring development

Photograph: Charlie Bibby/Newsteam

HOW I WILL VOTE

Alienated by Labour's dumbering down

How will you be voting?
I haven't decided yet. If I do vote at all, I'll vote Labour

Why?

I have never voted in a general election. I just missed being old enough in 1979, when I was more politically active than I am now, and I would definitely have voted Labour. Since then, I've been increasingly alienated by the political process. I don't think the current political spectrum, in terms of parties and politicians, actually represents the real issues.

What issues are important to you?

There is definitely going to be constitutional change over the next few years. The current electoral system is blatantly unfair.

The election campaign is now targeted to the 60,000 swing voters in the key marginal

seats. Both parties are targeting them with advertising directed at the tiny fiscal mentality of these 60,000 people. They are trying to persuade them that a penny off income tax here and a windfall there should mean they should elect them. Europe is also important. I'm a pro-European, and I've got no problem with a federal European

state. With the risk of sounding terribly Marxist, there is a certain historical inevitability about this.

Will you have made your mind up by polling day?
One of my slogans is "A vote for Blair is not a vote for Blair". There's a certain argument for trying to return as big a Labour

majority as possible in order to neutralise the Blairites of the party. Some of my Labour friends have persuaded me of this: if he gets a slim majority he will be able to have more control, because his whip will be tighter.

A week or so ago I made a decision that I would vote, and it would be for Labour, but as I've been following the election campaign, I've seen them talk such a load of cack, and this winds me up. If you pay any attention to the actual campaigning it makes you feel very alienated again.

What do you think of new Labour?

There are two problems here: firstly the Labour Party would not have been electable if it was still clinging to Clause IV, and to some of the corporatist attitudes that have been in the party traditionally.

I can understand why the

Labour Party took to reform these areas of policy. What I can't quite cope with is the dumbering down of Labour politics. I don't like the way in which Blair wants to roll back to the days of the individualism that emerged in the cultural revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s.

I despise his religious stance: it really angers me. I think he does have a point when he says that in a society in which family bonds are slackening a lot, there is a lot of potential for alienation. However, I think that the way in which he makes a virtue of his happy family home and pushes all of that is really quite nauseating.

When did you first become politically aware?
My father was a professor at the London School of Economics, and an adviser to Callaghan, so I grew up around politics.

Interview by Sam Coates

مكتبة من الأصول

Ancient Labour stalwart sticks to home territory

There have been no invitations for the veteran campaigner Tam Dalyell to assist the Blair camp

Stephen Goodwin

Tam Dalyell is "ancient Labour". The label is his own, offered with a certain mischief as he goes from door to door on Bathgate's Limefield estate, a maze of 1970s boxes overlooking the Edinburgh-Glasgow motorway and the spoil heaps of redundant shale mines.

For six days a week this is how Westminster's most dogged questioner will spend the campaign, on the knocker or in the market place, but never out of his Linlithgow constituency. In sharp contrast to previous elections, there are no invitations to go and lend his weight as a Labour veteran of 35 years in Parliament to contenders in marginal seats or at party rallies.

"They don't want to import trouble, I'm ancient Labour, I want nothing from the party leadership so they cannot control me," says Mr Dalyell who will be 65 in August. "They", of course, are the managers and spin doctors of the Blair court.

He recoils from the circus antics and news manipulation of today's presidential-style campaigning. But he passionately wants to sit on the government side of the Commons again and accepts the potential for embarrassment if he were to air his rebel views too widely.

The letter Mr Dalyell leaves at every house emphasises party policy on solid Labour issues such as the National Health Service and the minimum wage, but adds his strong personal belief in a European single currency. However, it makes no mention of devolution or the great conundrum he authored 20 years ago—the West Lothian Question.

A stickler for detail, Mr Dalyell points out between doorsteps that it was actually another anti-devolutionist, Enoch Powell, who coined the phrase during the marathon sessions on the 1970s home rule Bills.

Mr Dalyell had gone on at length about how he, as a Westminster MP, would be able to vote on education matters affecting Blackburn, Lancashire, but have no say on education in another Blackburn constituency. Mr Powell



Doorstep campaigner: Labour veteran Tam Dalyell canvassing opinions from a resident of Bathgate's Limefield estate in his Linlithgow constituency yesterday

Photograph: John Voos

vened with studied weariness to say the House was seized of the point, the penny had dropped, and henceforth it would be known as the West Lothian Question.

So would he fight Tony Blair's Scottish Parliament Bill with the same unflinching resolution? "I shall vote for the second reading because it needs to be discussed — and I shall be in my place every day," he says. Naked threats would be totally out of character. In a morning of

74-year-old John Coull, recalls the "the Blackburn question" and tells Mr Dalyell his criticism of home rule remains "just as true now as when you said it".

Tam Dalyell has represented the area since 1962, when he beat the Scottish Nationalist leader, Billy Wolfe, in a by-election. The SNP has been the challenger ever since and has a strong presence on the council.

Kenny MacAskill, a 40-year-old Edinburgh lawyer pushed the SNP's vote above 30 per cent in 1992 and is hopeful that

Blair and exasperation with Mr Dalyell's idiosyncrasies will sway more old Labour voters on 1 May. But he still needs a swing of 9.5 per cent.

As the Labour Party has changed around Mr Dalyell, so too has his constituency. Once dominated by mining and industries such as British Leyland's massive Bathgate plant and the Atlas foundry at Armadale — where steel plates were made for the Navy's Dreadnoughts — the big employers are now electronics firms like Motorola and

ry meetings for candidates are history.

Dalyells have lived at The Binn near the old county town of Linlithgow since the 17th century. "Tam" is named after a soldier who fought for the Royalists at Naseby and was one of the few people to escape from the Tower of London. He also formed the Scots Greys, in which his descendant did National Service as a trooper. It became the Scots Dragons.

Mr Dalyell campaigns in his regimental tie, under a comfortable sweater and tweed

jacket. The mark of a military past is apparently useful for a man known for his opposition to wars from the Falklands to the Gulf. He points the tie out, and drops the name of Field Marshal Lord Bramall, in a doorstep encounter with a 59-year-old man summarily made redundant by the Ministry of Defence and turfed out of his tied home. After listening intently, he says: "Look, I promise nothing, but I will damn well find out about this." Another obsessive "Tam" campaign is about to be launched.

Mr Dalyell was educated at Eton and King's College, Cambridge, but wears it lightly on the predominantly working-class estate. Though his wife Kathleen is a trustee of the housing association that owns the boxes, they are not to his taste as a heritage buff. "No Charles Rennie Mackintosh doors here," he says. Courteous to a fault, Mr Dalyell does not ask people to vote for him or even inquire how they are going to vote. "I think it is slightly rude, but then as I say, I am ancient Labour." When votes are

promised anyway he responds with a grateful "Bless you".

Doorstep controversy looms just once on Limefield when he returns to a house to tell a woman that if she is pregnant she should not be smoking. "After 29 years as a columnist for the *New Scientist* I do know something about this," he says. Lecturing would be constituents on their personal habits is probably not part of new Labour's charm offensive. But even confining the maverick to his home territory carries a certain risk.

Labour plans partial privatisation of Tube

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

A massive investment programme in London Underground could be financed by partly privatising the Tube system under a Labour government.

Senior Labour Party sources close to Tony Blair confirmed yesterday that the party is looking at the partial privatisation of the Tube to raise finance.

One option being studied is to create a "public interest" company with a Golden Share held by the Government to ensure that the control of London Underground remains in public hands.

Properties owned in central London by the Underground, said to be worth £8bn, could be

privatised to raise the money to invest in the network. The investment in out-dated underground services would be highly popular, but it would do nothing to fill the alleged £1.5bn "black hole" in Labour's finances.

The Shadow Chancellor, Gordon Brown, is understood to have asked for a study to be made of the alternatives for raising finance for London Underground, in addition to allowing the Post Office to raise private finance for more investment.

The proposals, which stop short of full-scale privatisation, have the backing of John Prescott, the deputy leader of the Labour Party. They explain the confusion surrounding Labour's privatisation plans last week, when Labour sources

denied that the Underground would be privatised.

Mr Prescott yesterday on GMTV hinted at his support for the plans when he reinforced his belief in public and private sector partnerships to raise money for investing in public services. He said he had long believed in "sweating" public assets to produce more money for investment.

"Gordon Brown has said let us review those resources and see that we can do the best by the taxpayer. In some cases it might be privatisation, in others it might be private-public partnership."

He added: "Gordon Brown made it absolutely clear he wanted to do an audit of public finances because we were well aware the Government had

made a mess of financing."

The Cabinet considered the so-called "Prescott option", he said, before going ahead with its plans for the total privatisation of London Underground, to which Labour is firmly opposed.

There is a consensus among the main parties that London Underground is in need of investment. There are fears at the extent of cracking in the Tube structure, letting in water, causing short-circuits and breakdowns. The rolling stock on some lines, particularly the Northern Line is antiquated and in need of replacement.

There is anger over the Government's plans for privatising the entire system because not all the money raised from the private sector would be re-invested in the Underground.

AROUND THE REGIONS

Votes for independent parties could cost Tories safe Northumbrian seat

With a majority of almost 13,500, Peter Atkinson would seem to be sitting rather more comfortably than most Tory MPs in the 1,000 square miles of his vast Hexham constituency in Northumberland.

But the Tory faithful are under no illusions that this is the safe Tory seat that it may appear. That majority in the 1992 election was considerably influenced by the "Amos factor", when the former Hexham MP Alan Amos was obliged not to seek re-election after being caught with a man at a homosexual haunt on Hampstead Heath in London.

His arrest and subsequent caution came only weeks before the election. The Liberal Democrat candidate Jonathan Wallace was also forced to reveal that he was living in a gay relationship.

When father-of-two, Peter Atkinson secured the Conservative nomination for the seat, the local Tories turned out in

HEXHAM COURANT

their droves to vote for him. The traditionally Methodist Northumbrian Liberals shied away from the unfortunate Mr Wallace, who was reduced to third place in a seat which was staunchly Liberal until before the Second World War.

There is no doubt that things will be a lot closer this time round. Unusually, all five candidates are local men, living in the constituency, and each will have a measure of personal support. If the more extreme polls are correct, then this constituency will fall to Labour, which needs a swing of 14 per cent.

Labour relies on Ian MacMinn, a respected county councillor, while the Liberal Democrats pin their hopes on university lecturer Philip Carr,

another local councillor. The wild cards are provided by flamboyant ex-RAF fighter pilot David Lott, who has drawn crowds to his UK Independence Party meetings, and retired dentist Robert Waddell, representing the Referendum Party.

Agriculture is a major employer in this scattered constituency, and the handling of the BSE crisis has infuriated many farmers. But the farmers' anger is directed more at Europe than the Tories, according to local farming expert Robert Forster.

He said: "There are many Euro-sceptics among the Tynesdale farming community, and the talk at the auction marts has been that their votes could well go to the UK Inde-

pendence Party or the Referendum Party, rather than the Tories. "However, farmers are equally concerned about the Labour Party's intentions on country sports six hunts operate within the constituency — and the effects of the 'Right to Roam' legislation. There is little doubt that Peter Atkinson will lose votes from the farming community, but probably not enough to cost him the seat."

Tory canvasser John Lynch said it was clear from responses on the doorsteps that there was a considerable amount of anti-government feeling, even among traditional Conservative voters. He said: "While they cannot quite bring themselves to vote Labour, many say they will vote for the UK Independence Party. I would also expect the Liberal Democrats to improve their showing after the Wallace debacle."

Brian Tilley
Hexham Courant

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Living a nightmare with Qana's dead

A year after Israel shelled a UN camp in Lebanon, killing more than 200 civilians, **Robert Fisk** meets the shattered survivors

Qana, southern Lebanon — Saadallah Balhas greeted me with a new glass eye to replace the one blasted out of his head by an Israeli shell a year ago this week. Old Khairiyeh Berji couldn't stand up to greet me, because she has only one leg now and her right arm is missing. Her daughter Najla, who desperately tried to revive her dead brothers in the blood of Qana, sits silently beside her, living on tranquillisers, like most of the other survivors of the Israeli massacre.

When the three-year-old at their feet hears the Israeli photo-reconnaissance drone moving over the hills, as it did during the massacre, he clatters beneath his bed in terror. The Israeli shells killed his grandparents a year ago.

The scars may have healed but they have left behind a more

terrible, invisible mutilation. "I live in my nightmares and dreams with people who are no longer here," Mr Balhas says, staring at me with that dead, sinister brown glass eye of his.

On 18 April 1996, 31 members of his family were literally cut to pieces around him, including his wife Zeinab, his sons Ghalib, Mohamed and Fayid and five-year old Mahmoud and his daughters Nayla, Fatmi, Zohra, Amal and six-year old Kahdija.

He wears their portraits inside a cellophane envelope on his chest, an identity card of the dead. And they look down on us from a collage of photographs framed on the wall.

"When I close my eyes, I see them but when I open my eyes, there is no one there. When I see them in my dreams, they talk to me, as if life is normal. And

I live with them still. I believe death is more preferable to this because when I die, I will be able to relax. But while I'm alive, I am dying every minute."

The Balhas family are buried in the mass grave next to the Fijian UN headquarters in Qana, a few yards from the place of their deaths, sealed beneath concrete and marble tombs along with the other civilian victims of the massacre. In all 109 are buried here, approximately 55 of them children.

"I visit the graves every day, whenever I have free time," Saadallah Balhas says. The wind blows chill through the door of his cement home in the village of Siddiqin, from where he and his family fled to Qana for the UN's protection a year ago. "The graves are almost my substitute home now. I recite the 'Fatihah', the opening words

of the Koran. I only know precisely where Ghalib lies. I was in hospital when they were all buried and I made people swear they would tell me exactly where each was put. But I only found one person who remembered and he only knew where

ed free — not for the first time. Wounded in Israel's 1993 bombardment of southern Lebanon, he still had a steel rod in his leg after an Israeli shell hit his home three years earlier when he was trapped in the slaughter at Qana.

"We don't feel they have died, especially the children, we still expect them to come back"

Ghalib was buried."

Like other survivors, Saadallah Balhas has received compensation from the local Lebanese authorities — just over £3,000 for each victim over 10, £4,000 for each child under ten. His own wounds are treat-

The Israelis shelled the UN compound and its hundreds of civilian refugees for 17 minutes after Israeli troops, who were busy laying booby-trap bombs inside the UN's zone in southern Lebanon, had come under Hizbollah mortar attack.

The Hizbollah fired 600ft from the UN base. The Israelis later claimed that their sustained shelling of the compound was a mistake, denying that a photo-reconnaissance drone was taking pictures at the time — until *The Independent* produced a video of the drone taken by a UN soldier.

It was the culmination of an Israeli bombardment that left almost 200 Lebanese dead — 13 of them guerrillas, the rest civilians. The assault followed a Hizbollah rocket attack on northern Israel, which in turn had been prompted by the killing of a Lebanese teenager by a booby-trap bomb suspected to have been laid by the Israelis. The UN concluded that the Qana massacre was unlikely to have been an error, a diplomatic way of saying it believed the shelling was deliberate.

Khairiyeh Berji takes the same view, sitting like a curled statue on her sofa, weeping because the stump of her right arm still burns into her and her face. She can only hop like a bird through her cold house on the arm of her grand-daughters. "For a year I've been sitting here like this," she wails at me. "All day I just sit here and cry. My arm is on fire and I feel something gnawing at the stump of my leg all the time. I can't sleep in the day and I can't sleep at night."

Her daughter Najla, who in a horrific stupor had tried to fit her dead brothers and her father together on that dreadful day, although they had been dismembered, looks at me with the same drugged eyes she had when last I saw her in the Tyre hospital a year ago, alongside Saadallah Balhas and her moth-

er. "Every day we go to the graves. We talk about the past and what we do to the family used to talk about when we were all here, the trips we went on, the meals we had together," she says. "We still do not feel they have died, especially the children. We still expect them to come back from a trip any day."

Najla Berji saw 16 members of her family killed around her, including her father Abbas, her sister-in-law Fatmi, her brothers Mustapha and Hussein, his little daughter Munal, her sister Ghada and Ghada's nine-month-old son Hassan.

On Friday, they will be remembered at a Qana commemoration by the Lebanese government, at which UN officers and the victims' families will stand together at the mass grave. The survivors will then be forgotten for another year.

Torn to pieces: Khairiyeh Berji lost an arm and a leg, and Saadallah Balhas (top left) lost an eye and 31 family members at Qana (lower centre). They are commemorated with a monument (top centre) Photographs: Robert Fisk



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مكتبة من الأصول

Shroud obscures tragedy of Turin fire

Andrew Gumbel

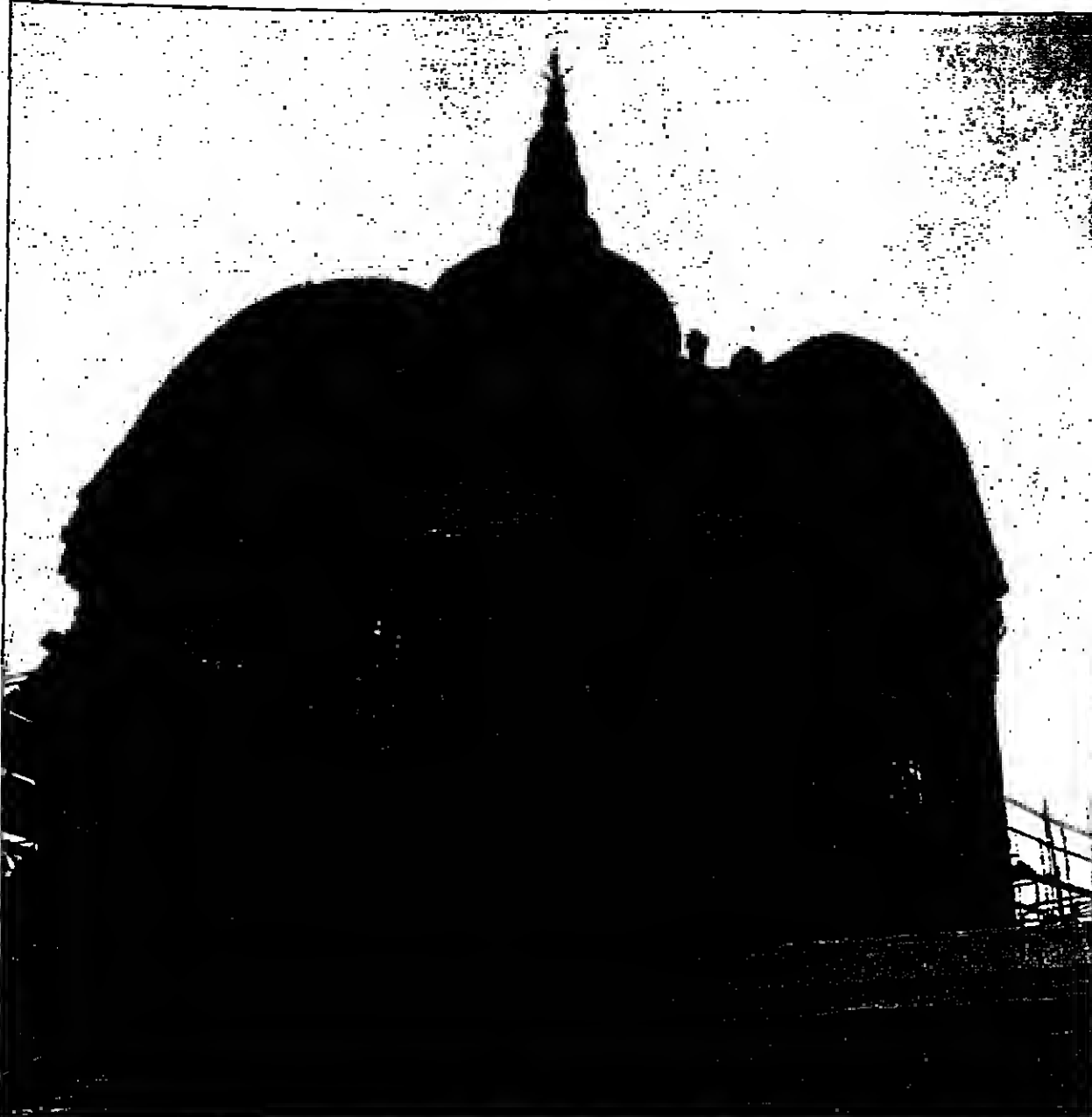
Amid all the fuss about saving the famous Shroud, the world almost failed to notice the greatest loss incurred by the fire that raged through Turin cathedral this weekend. The cupola, rising up above the chapel where the Shroud was kept, was one of the greatest pieces of Baroque architecture in Italy, a dizzying cone of interweaving lines stretching up towards the heavens.

Yesterday, Guarino Guarini's masterpiece – ironically about to be unveiled in its full splendour after two years of restoration – was reduced to a blackened hulk, its finely coloured stone and marble cracked and tarnished, its rafters entirely burned away and the detail of its stucco decoration melted by the sheer intensity of the heat. While the Roman Catholic world rejoiced at the heroic rescue of the Shroud by two firemen backing their way through the bullet-proof glass of the case in which it was kept, Italy's art experts were in an altogether darker mood.

"My first thought was that my grandchildren will never see Guarini's cupola," Lorenzo Mondo wrote in the Turin newspaper, *La Stampa*. The architect Vittorio Gregotti commented: "I'm happy they saved the Shroud. I only hope that to do it they did not neglect the magnificent cupola."

Many foreign tourists think of Turin as a city of motor cars and industrial power, unjustly neglecting a city centre of great elegance boasting some of the most harmonious Baroque architecture in Europe. Guarini was arguably the most talented of the handful of great architects at work there in the 17th century, but one whose name is little known outside Italy and seems condemned to obscurity through sheer bad luck.

His major works outside Italy, the churches of St Mary of Providence in Lisbon and Sainte Anne la Royale in Paris, were both destroyed during the 18th century, while his San Filippo e la Santissima Annunziata in the Sicilian town of Messina was



Devastated: The Guarini Cathedral cupola, destroyed by fire after two years of restoration work. Photograph: Reuters

paintings in the Palazzo, none of the first order, was destroyed along with furniture and artefacts estimated to be worth tens of millions of pounds. Although the Guarini chapel was wrecked, the main body of the Cathedral escaped with little more than smoke damage.

The Shroud having been carried out inside its elaborate golden box, was taken to the safety of a secret location believed to be a monastery somewhere in Piedmont, the region of which Turin is the capital. No firm leads were being followed up immediately by investigators, but theories being thrown around included everything from an electrical fault to arson perpetrated by the Mafia. Could the official dinner have caused a power overload, perhaps in the specially installed kitchen which was set up against a wall contiguous with the Guarini chapel?

Could someone with a grudge against the Shroud have set out deliberately to destroy it?

Italy has an unfortunate recent history of fires hitting its artistic heritage, not all of them accidents. In 1991, the opera house in Bari was burned down on the orders, as an investigation established, of local organised crime. Last year, it was the turn of La Fenice in Venice, and here too Mafia involvement has not been ruled out.

As for the restoration prospects, Italy is notoriously slow in that department.

The country does not have Germany's tradition of rebuilding damaged monuments from scratch, preferring to carry out restoration using as many of the original materials as possible. With a million bureaucratic obstacles to overcome, that means in practice that projects take years just to get off the ground.

La Fenice, for example, has remained untouched since the fire was put out more than a year ago.

wiped out by an earthquake in 1908. The cupola above the Shroud, which Guarini completed in 1694, was heavily influenced by Borromini's work in Rome, notably the corkscrew-shaped tower of Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza. Its six layers of interlocking stonework climbed

up towards a star-shaped gallery at the very top, imbuing a sense of wonder at the chaos far more compelling than the rather dubious claims of holiness for the Shroud.

As not one but two investigations were launched to discover the cause of the fire,

officials suggested yesterday that it started not in the cathedral, as first thought, but in the eaves of the Palazzo Reale next door. The Palazzo, historically the residence of the Princes of Savoy, antecedents to the Italian monarchy, had played host just a few hours earlier to a special dinner held for the visiting Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan.

A fire alarm inside the Palazzo went off just before midnight on Friday, alerting the fire brigade which spent the next 15 hours battling to put out the flames. An unknown number of

British soldiers in mass fight at Falklands base

Staff Correspondent

A brawl between rival units of British troops stationed in the Falkland Islands left one soldier with a broken ankle, and prompted tough disciplinary action from the garrison commander, it emerged yesterday.

The battle, between 150 men from the Irish Guards and the Royal Engineers posted to the bleak military garrison known as the Death Star, ended in a "bloodbath", witnesses said.

Many casualties required medical treatment and several were taken to hospital with injuries ranging from broken noses to concussion. One soldier, who suffered a severely broken ankle, had to be flown back in the Haslar military hospital in Gosport, Hampshire, for urgent treatment.

The fight, which broke out on Christmas Day last year, but which has only just come to light, "all started as a traditional bunfight at lunch," a witness said. "But someone threw a potato and a can was thrown back. Then all hell broke loose. There were pools of blood on the floor. The military police were summoned and went in with dogs to break it up." Brig-

adier Ian Campbell, the British commander at the garrison, immediately imposed tough disciplinary measures to clamp down on violent behaviour. Limits have been placed on the opening hours of bars on the Mount Pleasant base, and

It started as a bunfight, but someone threw a potato and all hell broke loose

weekend training exercises have been instigated. It is understood that at least one soldier was jailed for 28 days and others received shorter sentences.

Details of the incident underlined the long-standing morale problem of troops sent to the Falklands on four-month postings. Hundreds of soldiers and airmen, deprived of female

company and unwilling to venture far from the mass of drab green buildings that make up the British base, often fall prey to a ghetto mentality. Sources said petty squabbles assumed enormous significance and traditional loyalties became magnified.

The maze of bars, clubs, messes and accommodation blocks are linked by a bleak, two-and-a-half-mile, concrete-floored corridor. Accommodation Block 38 has been dubbed "the Bronx" because of its reputation for fighting and violent crime.

Senior officers freely admit their biggest headache is not maintaining a viable military deterrent to attack by Argentine forces, but how to maintain the men's morale 8,000 miles from home.

The traditional four-month posting is viewed by many troops as equivalent to a spell in prison. Pride of place often goes to "gozzomie" (goes home) calendars so that the days to their return to Britain can be marked off.

But the Ministry of Defence stressed it could not tolerate the type of "misbehaviour" seen at Mount Pleasant, which it viewed as a "very serious matter".

No English please, I'm Italian

Andrew Gumbel
Palermo

Stefano Iacolino, a primary school teacher from Favara in southern Sicily, has decided to take a stand. He won't teach English to his pupils. On principle.

Since January, Mr Iacolino's head has been trying in vain to get him to change his mind and has even opened disciplinary proceedings against him. The ministry in Rome has ordered that Italian schoolchildren must be taught English from an earlier age, the local education authority in Agrigento agrees, and now everyone wants Mr Iacolino to co-operate.

But there is one snag. Mr Iacolino doesn't speak English. "I refuse to insult the intelligence of my pupils," he says. "I don't know any English."

Southern Italy is a place where reverence for bureaucratic authority goes without saying, so Mr Iacolino's stand has caught everybody off balance. The headmaster of the Falcone Borsellino elementary school in Favara, Gaetano Azimone, argues that Mr Iacolino must be able to speak English because he was sent on a 100-hour course to learn it.

Mr Iacolino retorts that the course was five years ago and that only 20 of the 100 hours were devoted to language. "I've done four days of intensive English in my whole life and now they expect me to teach it to three years of primary school," Mr Iacolino said.

Mr Iacolino is even offering to reimburse the cost of the course. "I want to have my English officially tested so they can see how bad it is," he added.

"It's a very difficult language to learn and I had terrible trouble with it."

The incident illustrates what can happen when a population anxious to improve its English meets a bureaucracy that has no understanding of how language-learning works. The standards of English teaching in Italian schools is generally lamentable and there is little exposure to English in everyday life. English-language films, for example, are all dubbed.

The English on display in restaurants and hotels is a source of linguistic comedy. A fier for a new restaurant offers "pungents with pour", whatever they may be. The bistro near our house has this mystifying message in the window: "Dear visitors of Rome, we do not melk you." What on earth does that mean?

significant shorts

Zaire rebels restart war after deadline expires

Zaire rebels said they were restarting the civil war against the Kinshasa-based government after a three-day pause and demanded the resignation of President Mobutu Sese Seko. The rebel leader, Laurent Kabila, would probably go to South Africa soon to spur negotiations on Mr Mobutu's departure from power, Bizima Karaha, foreign-affairs commissioner in the rebel alliance, said. In Kinshasa the military governor appealed for calm after what he called widespread panic over a possible attack on the city by rebels. Reuters - Goma

Chaos in eastern Slavonia poll

Chaotic elections yesterday in eastern Slavonia denied Croatian Serbs' confidence that they can have a say in their future. Polls opened late, many names were missing from voters' lists and even the ballot boxes were absent in some precincts in the region. In Ilok, a predominantly Croat city, Serbs were angered to find that most voter rolls list only Croats' names. "People are going home, angry," said the local Serb leader, Vojislav Stankovic. Six years ago, rebel Serbs backed by the Yugoslav army captured the region in a brutal campaign Croats have not forgotten. The Serbs of eastern Slavonia were voting for the first time in independent Croatia. AP - Vukovar

Pope's Sarajevo plea

The Pope appealed to Bosnians to forgive each other and transform Sarajevo from a symbol of suffering into a model of co-existence. Tens of thousands of pilgrims arrived at a football stadium near the wartime front line hours early and then braved bad weather to attend the Pope's Mass. AP - Sarajevo

Albanians hail Prodi

Flag-waving crowds greeted the Italian Prime Minister, Romano Prodi, in the insurgent south, where rebels are demanding the resignation of the Albanian president. Italian soldiers and rebels escorted Mr Prodi and his Albanian counterpart, Bashkim Fino, who discussed the role of the multinational force that has started arriving in the country to secure food-aid deliveries. AP - Vlorë

Woman shoots Israeli guards

A woman crossing into the Israeli-ruled West Bank from Jordan shot and wounded an Israeli security man and an Israeli soldier at the Allenby bridge. "The security man was hit in the shoulder and the soldier was wounded in the hip, both slightly. The woman, a Palestinian, has been arrested," police said. Reuters - Jerusalem

India scrambles to find a PM

Astrologers, politicians and rebellious MPs joined in a desperate hunt for a successor to the ousted Indian Prime Minister, HD Deve Gowda, as prospects of early polls loomed. Politicians said Mr Deve Gowda's 15-party coalition and his ally-turned-foe, the Congress Party, were each battling to keep their deputies together amid reports of a threatened rebellion prompted by poll fears and political uncertainty. Reuters - New Delhi

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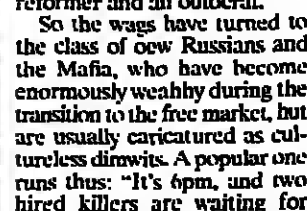
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MOSCOW DAYS

Political comment remains surprisingly rare. Given its level of social and economic strife, you would expect the streets of Russia to resemble the Falls

For the Air Force, a worrying fact - described as "highly unusual" - is that a trainee fighter pilot and his aircraft can disappear so totally for so long.



absurdist, and self-deprecating appeal. "What's the difference between Communism and Capitalism?" runs one old chestnut. Answer: "Capitalism is the ex-

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arts

Talking about my generation

The innovative series 'This Life', written by young people, with young directors and a young crew to boot, is back for a second prime-time series. But are all twenty-something lawyers obsessed with sex and drugs? Nick Hasted asks the actors

"I wanted to give a voice to my generation," said Amy Jenkins, 29, who the first series of *This Life* aired last year. "Because they've never had one on television." The series she'd devised had its roots in demographics, as much as art. It was the BBC2 controller Michael Jackson's decision to make the station's first "continuing drama" about people in their twenties, targeting young viewers attracted by his like *Shooting Stars*. But it was Jenkins, a trainee solicitor in the City until she gave it up to write, who made the series what it quickly became: one of the most subtly innovative shows of last year. Set in a City law firm like the one Jenkins escaped from, centring on five housemates beginning their legal careers, its characters were a careful cross-section: Miles (Jack Davenport), from a well-off background; Milly (Amita Dhiri), an Asian woman in a long-term relationship; Warren (Jason Hughes), a gay man from a Welsh small town; Egg (Andrew Lincoln), Milly's partner, who realises he doesn't want to be a lawyer, and quits; and Anna (Daniela Nardini), a single, sexually adventurous Scottish woman.

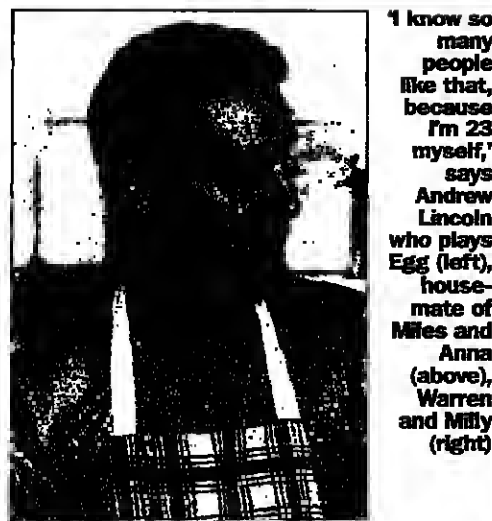
It could still have been the yuppie soap from hell. The immediate reaction of viewers was often hostile. Its characters could seem like spoilt, moody rich kids (at least prospectively), obsessed with drinking, sex and their careers. The series' twitching, *NYPD Blue*-style camera work could be distracting. Over an episode or two, it could seem that nothing much was happening — that it was going nowhere. But over the course of the first series, those criticisms were revealed as *This Life*'s strengths. Its characters were often dis-

likeable, but deliberately so. They were flawed. The series' limited run meant it didn't need the cycles of crisis and resolution which power soaps. It used this freedom to avoid happy endings and, sometimes, any endings at all. When Warren told his brother that he was gay, the brother, a sympathetic character, listened to all the arguments against his prejudice, ignored them, and went back to Wales. Milly and her boss spent weeks building up to an affair, then decided against it. The dramatic force of the final episode, when every hanging emotional strand was brought into play, was considerable.

Despite the inclusiveness of its cast, *This Life* also largely steered clear of the "issue"-based drama of *EastEnders* or *Brookside*. Its characters' generation made subjects which would otherwise be thought sensitive, matter-of-fact. Warren's friends didn't give his homosexuality a second thought. Milly's ethnicity has yet to be mentioned. The nearest the series came to an explicit social point grew naturally from its characters' age, who Anna found herself defecating a drug-dealer she'd bought an E from at a club the night before.

This Life was sometimes as irritating as anyone in its generation can be. But it was not predictable. It wasn't always comfortable to watch. And, it turned out, it wasn't over. A second series, twice as long, was commissioned as soon as the first series' success became clear. Amy Jenkins has moved on. But everyone else is still aboard. It's four weeks into its 21-week run. And in a west London studio, cranking out episodes against the clock, the house is back in session.

Meet the actors, and one reason for *This*



I know so many people like that, because I'm 23 myself," says Andrew Lincoln who plays Egg (left), house-mate of Miles and Anna (above), Warren and Milly (right)

This Life's success becomes obvious. Daniela Nardini (Anna) and Andrew Lincoln (Egg) are handling interviews. Nardini, more nervous than her sarcastic character, still lets the occasional barb fly, and Lincoln, guilelessly talkative, is like a more confident Egg. They're not only sympathetic to their parts, but to each other. They should be. The producers spent more than a month looking at actors before casting. And, once the house was assembled, another week was put aside to make the actors as intimate as the characters. "We know an awful lot about each other's lives," says Nardini. "I'm spending more time with these people than with my family or

friends." "We all support each other," Lincoln agrees. "We're good mates." All of the cast are in their twenties, all are at the start of their careers. They're at the same place in their lives as their characters.

That camaraderie has been needed for the new series. Twenty-one episodes instead of 11, they're filming "quicker than a porno movie, but with sound", according to Davenport. There are now 15 regular characters instead of the original five, a decision made from fear that the housemates on their own would become boring. The intensifying drama of the first series, largely the work of the departed Jenkins, has been lightened. The "issue" of War-

ren's sexuality has been brought centre-stage, with his arrest for cottaging. Like the first series, things may kick in later. But for the moment, its schedule makes it resemble the word its production staff seem terrified of using: a soap.

"I'm not going to mouth off saying, 'Oh, it's a continuing drama,' which is apparently what we're supposed to call it," Lincoln responds. "To my off-days, you go, 'I just want to get out of this fucking soap.' That's just because the turnover's what a soap's about. But I know the script-writing's not like a soap's. I know the directing's not. I hope the acting isn't." The producer Jane Fallon's previous job was

oo *EastEnders*, of course. "I don't know," he says, as Fallon walks past. "I don't say anything about that. I'll be shot!"

Soap or not, both actors are convinced of the series' worth. "I think there's a lot of intelligence there," says Nardini. "It doesn't try to make monsters or villains out of its characters. It shows people who live in a city and behave badly sometimes. It shows people who take drugs and don't die. It's trying to be realistic."

"Everyone seems to be into it," Lincoln adds. "It's like a breath of fresh air for a lot of young people. They go, 'Great! Young people! On TV! Talking about things!' I found it really astonishing going to clubbing when the first series finished. People came up to me like they knew me. People were going, 'Jesus, man, I'm having the same thing, la la la... you and Millyman.'"

Lincoln's character, Egg, is *This Life*'s litmus test for viewers over 30. Though he began as a lawyer, he quit. Relying on his girlfriend's income, he made a vague attempt at writing novels then gave up. People who are used to a career as an end in itself are going to think he's a waster. Lincoln is more sympathetic. "I'm playing somebody who doesn't really know what he's doing in life," he says. "He's not a stupid human being, but he's made a choice to look at what he really wants. He's stepped back to be in control of his own destiny, and he's the only one in the series who is, because he's so uncertain of what he wants to do. I know so many people like that, because I'm 23 myself. I hope that it's quite a truthful portrayal of that age-group."

What may really ensure that *This Life* is looked back on in years to come, irrespective of its dramatic merits, is that in an industry where serving your time still counts, it isn't only the actors who are under 30. Directors, writers and crew are, too. In a way that has little precedent, *This Life* is bleeding a generation. The actors can only speculate on the reasons, and count their blessings. "These sorts of opportunities for a lot of us within a year of starting, it just doesn't happen," says Lincoln, "especially to do something about ourselves, about young people. I feel like I've done a rep in a year-and-a-half, in TV. It's almost like a shake of the hand, and off you go. Welcome to the business."

There are rumours that when *This Life*'s second run finishes, the house may be broken up, more new blood brought in. The actors have a clue. They're only shown scripts three episodes in advance. But even if they do go their separate ways, they're sure they've been part of something special. "I can speak for everyone in the cast and crew," says Lincoln seriously. "We're all very proud of the work that's been churned out." He catches himself. "Churned out being the operative word!" Then he has to go and he down. When you're churning out classic TV, you need all the rest you can get.

This Life is on BBC2 tonight at 9.45pm

Interview



Deborah Ross

talks to

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CLASSICAL

Christ on the Mount of Olives

St Martin-in-the-Fields, London

formance of this rarely heard work with young vocal soloists and a reduced orchestra (the London Soloists Chamber Orchestra) in the church of St Martin-in-the-Fields, showed that the music of *Christ on the Mount of Olives* is by no means negligible. The orchestral introduction is atmospheric and compelling: the choral writing may be uneven but it has its fine moments; and some of Jesus' music is surprisingly stirring — all credit to the tenor Robert Carlin for his ardent and secure singing in this challenging role.

To be frank, the first half of

the evening (excerpts from Mozart's *The Magic Flute*) had not been very promising. The solo singing varied in quality: there was some initial disagreement within the orchestra as to the key-signature for Pamina's aria "Ich ich fühl's", and the loose change in conductor David Josefowitz's jacket pocket provided an intermittent percussive ostinato as it rattled against the leg of his metal chair.

Fortunately, though, everyone rose to the occasion after the interval for *Christ on the Mount of Olives*. Robert Car-

lin's Christ has already been mentioned, and Nicola-Jane Kemp (a creditable Queen of the Night in the first half) was a scintillating soprano Seraph. Chorus and orchestra sang and played as though they meant it, and Josefowitz judged the pace very well, so that the final "Alleluia" chorus made a satisfyingly emphatic conclusion.

Christ on the Mount of Olives may not be one of Beethoven's most sublime creations, but it is difficult to see why it has been so thoroughly ignored over the years. It deserves at least an occasional revival, and not simply as a musicalological curiosity. If there's a spare 35 minutes in the next Proms season, a well-acted performance would more than plug the gap.

Stephen Johnson

THEATRE

The Amen Corner

Old Vic, Bristol

In the Harlem ghetto of the 1950s New York, the true source of misery is the dollar, not the Devil. *The Amen Corner* is an extraordinary attack on the analogue of religion, pounding home the message that "all we done to be cursed is be poor". It's not your sins that kill your babies and your loved ones, nor lack of piety that stops you from putting bread on the table — it's the poverty. But religion looms large over the lives of Sister Margaret's congregation, and in Paulette Randall's production, the shabby mission hall squats over the sketchily outlined living quarters, filling with an ebb and flow of worshippers whose eruptions into rapturous song lend a background soundtrack to the action.

James Baldwin's tragedy of a woman who applies the varnish of the Lord to cover the wounds of her past, only to have it stripped away layer by painful layer, crackles to life in a frenzy of pure-cut holy roller religion. Sister Margaret leads her small flock along the path of righteousness with unbending puritan piety. But when Luke, her louche jazz musician husband, returns after a 10-year separation just in time to collapse across the kitchen table with terminal TB, the rigidly heaven-bound structure of her life begins to collapse. Her congregation's rebellion, her son abandons his strict Christian upbringing in favour of the life of a strutting jazzman, and the carefully applied coating is chipped away to leave her weep-

ing over the gaping holes in her life which religion has merely papered over. However, the play marches towards its inevitable conclusion to a symphony of beat, with gospel music and humour applied lavishly — all the better to counterpoint the tragedy, climaxing with Luke's death onstage to the accompaniment of a lively devotional jive in the hall above.

The outstanding performance comes from Michael Price as Margaret's son David. In his first professional role, he displays both excellent comic timing and a fine feel for Hamletian soul-searching, and his departing speech to his mother — "I want to be a man. It's time you let me be a man" — leaves the audience in a breathless hush where one can sense a thousand hands teetering on the edge of an ovation.

There is an Arthur Miller feel to the way in which the play depicts the quiet and desperate inevitability of Margaret's entropic shift from order to chaos; but at the same time the story is firmly grounded in the blend of fervent religion and soul-deep poverty unique to the ghetto. As part of Bristol Old Vic's on-going commitment to black theatre, the production is not only an excellent opportunity to see this rarely staged play, but also a chance to see some fine performers demonstrating that there is a great deal more to black British acting than bit-parts in *The Bill*. To 3 May (0117 987 7877)

Toby O'Connor Morse

THEATRE

Power of Darkness

Orange Tree Theatre, London

Where Tolstoy was concerned, precept didn't always match up with practice. After his religious conversion, he may have urged intellectuals to copy the simple, wise way of life of the peasant, but this airy idealisation kept getting tripped up by brute fact. In James Goldman's recent biography, the aristocratic genius, in full peasant regalia, was seen wrangling with a perplexed servant over which of them should have the honour of emptying his chamber pot. "You empty yours; I'll empty mine. Both of us are free; that makes us equal." Some of us more equal than others, however, for having unbearably burdened himself of this piety, Tolstoy, with majestic obliviousness, proceeded to leave his full pot in the servant's capable hands.

In *Power of Darkness*, his best play, now engrossingly revived by Sean Holmes at the Orange Tree, Tolstoy's theoretical veneration of peasant life is almost wholly set aside as he trains an unsparring gaze on the ugly, superstition-ridden reality. It's a story of how adultery leads to avarice, murder, further adultery and infanticide before redemption is found in confession and repentance. In its portrayal of a marriage unravelling in the shadow of a crime, and in its depiction of the waking nightmare of a guilty conscience, this dark, intense work invites comparison with *Macbeth* and Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*.

Aniya (Katrina Leavelle), the wilful second wife of a well-to-do, ailing peasant, has started an affair with his husband's handsome young labourer, Nikita

(Dermot Kerrigan). She is incited to murder her husband by the poison-dispensing Matrona, Nikita's ruthless mother who, in Colette O'Neill's excellent, calmly implacable performance, masterminds evil in the soothing commonsensical tones of a wise old granny who knows what's best. This incongruity is particularly chilling in the fourth act. By then, the couple are married and have got the money, but Nikita is drinking heavily, hates his wife and has impregnated his simple-minded, hostile stepdaughter (Lisa Stevenson). So now Matrona has to supervise the dispatching of a baby.

Having skillfully projected the shiftness, cocky swagger and underlying weakness of the irresponsible, philandering Nikita, Kerrigan does as good a job on his existential crisis, as he shoots back up from the cellar where he has reluctantly taken the still-living bundle, haunted by the sound of its little bones crunching as he crushed them. It's a great scene, Nikita's anguish played off against Anya's vindictive satisfaction that he is now as guilty as she. Tolstoy's didactic Christian intentions in reducing Nikita to a state where he needs to take full blame and strive himself publicly are all too evident. But not, ironically, to the peasants at which the play was aimed. "What can I tell you Lev Nikolayevich?" said one, quizzed as to the meaning. "As first Nikita managed his affairs cleverly, but in the end he proved to be a fool..."

To 31 May (0181-940 3633)

Paul Taylor

Tomorrow in the Tabloid: Tom Lubbock on Duane Hanson's all-American latex mannequins

125 من الأصل

Interview

**ULIAN CRITCHLEY**

'Food critic.
Wonderful job,
and one usually
reserved for the
editor's
mistress, or so I
believe'

A high-contrast, black and white close-up portrait of a man's face. The image is heavily shadowed, with deep blacks and bright whites, creating a grainy, almost stencil-like effect. The man's eyes are dark and intense, looking directly at the viewer. His nose and mouth are partially obscured by the shadows, but his expression is serious and somewhat menacing. The texture of his skin and the details of his facial features are emphasized by the stark lighting.

Julian Critchley:
His mother said:
'The girls at the
Tories are much
the nicest. You
shall join them'
Photograph:
Glyn Griffiths

'We never made love properly, so we made do with French kissing and happy back-seat fumbling'

Who wants to be a Greek virgin?

Oh well - as long as they were done in olive oil.



the leader page

Europe moves on, but Britain isn't looking

Among the pack of dogs that have not barked this election, the most silent has been the matter of Europe.

It is extraordinary. The issue that tore the latter months of the Major premiership to shreds, the issue that since 1975 has turned Labour inside out – and, so far, barely a campaign whisper. Sir James Goldsmith and his Referendum Party have faded even further into electoral invisibility. They held a huge rally, thousands turned out, but it will make no difference whatever to their vote. As for Labour and the Tories, to say that they are in cahoots would be to invite the charge of being more conspiracy-minded than the writers of *Dark Skies*. Yet they are succeeding in making Europe a non-issue. The parties have chosen not to place European integration and the single currency before the British people in straightforward terms. But that, it seems, is how the public at large wants it.

The rest of Europe is not holding its breath. In Bonn and Paris and in Madrid and Rome, interest in the outcome of our election is tepid. The game moves on. The Dutch are preparing their drafts for the Amsterdam summit in June, including one interesting paper which would entail somebody having to choose whether to sack either Neil Kinnock or Sir Leon Brittan. Chancellor Kohl has announced his intention to

stand for re-election in 1998, with the effect of renewing his party's dedication to the creation of the euro.

In the Adriatic, in spite of Malcolm Rifkind's best efforts to block action of any kind, Italian sailors and marines have striven to seal the borders of the European Union (to which the United Kingdom still belongs) from a wave of Albanian immigrants; meanwhile, Italy's government has just survived a parliamentary challenge to its forward policy in that troubled country, self-consciously forged in the service of Europe.

Here in Britain, conventional wisdom says that the public has become more Euro-sceptic. More and more people tell pollsters that they are opposed to Britain's joining the single currency in 1999, and considerable numbers add "ever". At least there is enough evidence of such cooling to impress Labour's handlers and campaign managers. On two recent set-piece occasions, Tony Blair has gone out of his way to use sceptical language: if he did not quite say "the nation state is safe in my hands", that is what he meant. The man who is unprepared to return to the Scots the sovereignty they gave up in 1707 is unlikely (this is one reading of his Caledonian *démarche*) to be a patsy in the Council of Ministers in Brussels. Robin Cook repositioned his party on the single currency in present public

mood, any date beyond the year 2000 is as good as never.

Given all that, it is perhaps surprising how little movement there has been in the Conservative position. We talk about the Angela Browning affair. But the breaking of ranks was anticipated. It matters, but it does not much affect how people react to the substantive issue. The country already knows that the Conservative party is split in Europe; it has, in effect, been discounted in the polls in the same way that the financial markets discount an anticipated interest rate, or expected poor unemployment figures.

There is a good reason why the Tories have not seized the hour on Europe, and why they will gain little if they are tempted to "out" the party as Euro-sceptic. Europe is not an election battleground. The public have Europe in mind, but have concluded that it is going to be debated and decided in due course, either during a referendum campaign or during the next parliamentary election. There is no need to worry about it now, because neither of the main parties is going to sign up to the single currency for a while yet. As for a referendum, Labour ("formidable obstacles" to a single currency)

promises one with gusto. The Tories (single currency "unlikely") promise one with knobs on. There, in a nutshell, is the public's puzzle at the very presence of Sir James and his motley band: everyone and his dog is offering us a referendum, so why bother with a Referendum Party?

Liberal Democrats and (to some extent) the Scottish and Welsh nationalists will say that they have put Europe forward. Vote ScotNat for an independent Scotland that will forthwith abandon one of the principal instruments of sovereignty. Vote Liberal Democrat for a single currency now, though it is not at all clear how the party's commitment to raise taxes and spending (for the sake of the schools!) can be fitted inside the Maastricht treaty's convergence criteria without large and corresponding cuts in spending and/or yet more, unspecified tax rises elsewhere.

But with those exceptions, Euro-silence rules. It is not admirable, this silence – nor is it sustainable for long. Some day soon, Euro-sceptics old and new are going to have to describe the condition and qualities of their Britain – a Britain standing outside the inner core of EU countries, yet forced to treat with Germany on vital questions of European security and EU enlargement. Chancellor Kohl is not going to be deflected from the project he considers so important, which means that

Britain will have to adapt to a single currency – or make other arrangements.

Public and mainstream politicians alike have proved deeply reluctant to think through what their distaste for further European integration entails. The British people are sensible enough to know that they cannot shut the garden gate and let the foreigner get on with it. But they seem content to postpone the argument for now.

A winner for London

The London Marathon and remains an extraordinary event. In part, it is about highly paid athletic professionalism – which yesterday produced a heart-stopping finish between Liz McGolgan and Joyce Reppchumba. Long may it continue to attract the best competitors over his distance. But it is also a people's event. Well-organised, backed by big money sponsorship, tightly policed, it has managed to retain the magical popular enthusiasm, both for the god causes represented by the runners, and for their slogging determination to cover 26 miles. Other cities have their marathons, but London can lay claim to hosting the best.

Wong is right to badger Beijing

Tony Barber

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Scientists kept occupied by evolution

Sir: Mark Smith (letter, 10 April) takes Paul Valéry ("Creative tension", 8 April) to task for believing in evolution without "looking at all possibilities before accepting one as fact" as scientists are supposed to do.

I'm not sure why he is so certain that Mr Valéry has not examined the creationist explanation. The problem is that, though it could be true, it is not a scientific explanation. That is to say, it is not an explanation that generates testable hypotheses.

The theory of evolution and natural selection has generated enough hypotheses to keep thousands of scientists occupied all their lives in exploring them: from the search for order in a fragmented fossil record to the conditions under which altruistic behaviour might be expected to emerge from the selfish interactions of genes. Even if it turned out not to be true (although the evidence is so far overwhelmingly in favour) it would still have been the most valuable scientific hypothesis that man has yet produced, because of the huge expansion in our understanding of the natural world that has resulted.

What does the creationist hypothesis do for science? It answers every question of "why?" with "God made it that way". There is nothing for science to do if any explanation in terms of complex interactions of structures and forces could be undermined by a miracle. If God could create the world, and trivially keep animals alive on no ark, then what's the point in researching cancer? It must be even more trivial for him to start or stop the reproduction of malignant cells.

Far from being common sense, for the scientist, creationism is a counsel of despair.
BARBARA WEBB
Nottingham

Sir: Those who think the Deluge really happened (letters, 10 April) might try imagining it with the eyes of Leonardo da Vinci, whose notebooks describe in detail the scene as the waters rose continually for 40 days: the hills crowded with people fighting for their lives against each other, and against wild beasts that had also made for high ground, the starvation, the thirst, the parents killing their children to save them further suffering. What had this "pitiless slaughter", as Leonardo calls it, "genocide", as we might say today, to do with any notion of justice attributable to a god?

Leonardo was sceptical about the whole thing. If the waters covered the mountain-tops, the world would have been a globe of water, he pointed out, and where could the waters have run off, once the deluge ended?

He was, of course, centuries ahead of his time. Seeing how many still believe this moral, or rather immoral, fable to be true, I ask myself how many more centuries will be needed before he makes his mark.
RONALD GRAY
Emmanuel College, Cambridge

Sir: Paul Valéry's article (Tabloid, 8 April) was interesting but it contained two errors. Noah did not take two of each species into the ark, he took two of each "kind". The biblical "kind" is



a much broader definition than species. Some scholars have estimated that there are 43 kinds of mammals, 74 kinds of birds and 10 kinds of reptiles. So, no problems with space and not too much difficulty with disposing of wastes.

The time given to Noah to assemble all these creatures was seven days not 24 hours (see Genesis 7:4). Fundamentalists do a disservice to the biblical record. The Bible uses metaphor, similes, allegory, figures of speech, etc just as we do in our speech and writing. To take each word "literally" is obviously wrong.
MICHAEL DAVENPORT
London SW18

Sir: Anyone who doubts evolution need only look around them in the office or the streets. Everyone they see will be different from everyone else. In particular, they will all be different from their parents.

The characteristics of a species are not static, but constantly changing. Evolution is a necessary consequence of this.
ANDREW COSGROVE
Corsham, Wiltshire

Sir: It was with incredulity that I read the claims outlined by Deborah Woolhouse (letter, 10 April). Yes, Genesis tells us that two of every kind of bird, animal and creature would come along to the ark: what it doesn't tell us is how they got there nor how they knew where to go.

Perhaps God provided detailed directions or appropriate transport along with the invitations issued to the lucky two representatives of every species.
MICHAEL ROBERTS
Bromborough, Merseyside

Labour's plans for privatisation

Sir: As a Labour Party supporter and member of 58 years' standing – canvassing, filling envelopes, taking minutes at ward meetings – I was sick at heart to hear Tony Blair and other Labour leaders publicly sponsoring the policy of privatisation and most immediately the idea of privatising the air traffic controllers (election 97; "Privatisation is exposed as Labour's Achilles' heel", 10 April).

When the Tory government hit on the idea of selling publicly owned £10 notes for £5 to those who could lay their hands on enough capital, the justification given was that it would make for more efficient management of those assets, or one in government was honest enough to admit that North Sea oil revenues were being dissipated at an alarming rate and nor, for the most part, did the press ever make this point. In other words, the need to fill the Treasury coffers was the motivating factor.

Mr Blair has explained why he feels he is left with no alternative to taking over the Tories plan to fill a spending gap by selling off public assets, but he must know that private enterprise makes financial successes of public enterprises by sacking workers and reducing the rights and working conditions enjoyed by those who are left.
JOHN PALMLEY
Westbury, Wiltshire

Middle East peace 'not dead'

Sir: Robert Fisk's assertion that "a dream of peace is dead" (9 April) illustrates how Westerners often expect quick answers and solutions to problems that have been in the process of evolution and resolution for generations.

Where in the Middle East is there peace today? Shall we say there is peace in Egypt because she regained Sinai and conveniently washed her hands of Gaza with its Palestinian population? A vicious war continues between Mubarak's government and Muslim aspirants. Apparently Lebanon is at peace now, she too having rid herself of her erstwhile Palestinian guests. But for how long will her people tolerate the colonisation of their country by Syria and Israel?

Libya seems also to have found peace recently in the wake of its expulsion of more than 25,000 Palestinian "fifth columnists". But how long before Gaddafi picks a fight with Chad again, or his own people decide they have had enough of his dictatorship? Kuwait similarly found that expulsion of the Palestinians was useful in the aftermath of the Gulf War, and presumably this too was aimed at achieving a more lasting peace in the area. One wonders though, how long Iraq will remain dormant to preserve that tenuous peace.

King Hussein of Jordan is currently the darling of the Western world because he maintains the peace he made with

Israel and behaved so impeccably after the recent massacre of Jewish children. But the King can afford to act as he does since, like Egypt, he conveniently shifted the problem of the West Bank Palestinians off his front lawn and into Israel's back yard. Whatever arrangement we may eventually arrive at with the Israelis, Black September will remain an indelible part of the Palestinian memory.

Notwithstanding the above, the so-called "peace process" is not dead, as Mr Fisk has described it, for that would leave us with no hope whatever for the future. In the Middle East, peace has always been relative, some would say moribund, but the main thing as far as we Palestinians are concerned is that the process of finding a way forward continues realistically, within its proper context of the region as a whole, and above all remains flexible. If we are to have hope for the peoples of the Middle East in general and for the Palestinians and Israelis in particular, we must first appreciate our history and then say with a cynical optimism, "The peace may be dead: long live the process."
DR FIRAZ AL-AHMAR
London W4

All at sea over the climate

Sir: While the UK indulges in the election campaign, a few scientists will be hard at work at sea, somewhere in the North-east Atlantic. Between 15 April and 16

May, an international and multidisciplinary group of oceanographers will be investigating the variability of biological activity and its relationship to ocean dynamics. The investigation of the ocean's role in climate continues, regardless of this election.

Or will it? A recent report by the Commons Science and Technology Committee warns that existing funds for climate research could be "spread more thinly and less effectively". There is disturbing evidence that this is a direct result of political pressure on both the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and the Meteorological Office to become "more market-oriented". NERC resources are being squeezed at the expense of oceanography.

One wonders if, at the end of our cruise, we will return to a post-election Britain which is prepared to make the necessary commitment to fund research into ocean science and the climate system at large.
DR DAVID CROMWELL
Southampton Oceanography Centre

Prohibition lesson

Sir: Emma Daly is right to draw attention to the greed and violence underpinning the Ecstasy culture (10 April) but she draws the wrong conclusion. The gang warfare has nothing to do with Ecstasy or its users, it is simply a consequence of the policy of prohibition. If Ecstasy were legalised today, the violence she describes would stop tomorrow. The lessons of prohibition in the US show that it really is as simple as that.
JONATHAN JONES
Oxford

Lighting up public places

Sir: Jonathan Glancey hits a few targets but also misses some in his piece about the widespread use of fluorescent lighting in out-buildings and public places (Architecture, 11 April).

The range of light sources available to the lighting designer today is greater than at any previous time. That we encounter so many fluorescent types – tubes, circular, compact etc – is due largely to three factors: economic running costs (much cheaper than tungsten light bulbs), a range of colours and colour-rendering properties that make the lamps suitable for so many applications, and a useful life of up to 18,000 hours, compared with a mere 1,000 hours for the familiar light bulb. The introduction in recent years of the hi-frequency tube and control gear has made the fluorescent option the most popular, and currently there is little challenge to its dominance in areas suited to it.

Lighting design is another matter entirely. This Institution leads the way in Britain in providing the best technical and design guidance available to the lighting engineer/designer, through its code for interior lighting and a range of lighting guides. These promote visual variety but counsel the use of even lighting where it is appropriate. The products exist, the guidance exists, but so often it is the economic consideration that dictates what products will be used, not the aesthetic.

In transport lighting you will find that London Transport is now employing leading lighting designers for its new stations on the Jubilee Line extension and for other station refurbishments. As to blotting out the stars, I can only say that again there is the right equipment available but while many local authorities continue to employ civil engineers to design street lighting, it is unlikely to be used appropriately.

We have the design guidance and the products to achieve good lighting, tailored to our needs and sympathetic to our sensibilities. All we have to do is use them, or employ those who know how to.
KARL PIKE
Secretary
Lighting Division
The Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers
London SW12

Dogged voters

Sir: Further to "Power to the pooches" (11 April), dogs do have the chance to vote.

Dogs Today magazine researched and printed each party's dogfests and is encouraging every dog in Britain to use its right to suffrage. All votes received are eaten by a life-size Ballot Boxer, then displayed on our Bones-for-Votes swing-o-meter.

Labour are currently romping home like a typical Lab – they have 51 per cent of the votes. Lib Dems and Tories have been scrapping, but Lib Dems are a cold nose ahead at 26 per cent with the Conservatives in the dog house with only 2.3 per cent.

Over 635 dogs have already voted and we'll keep our Ballot Boxer open until the human version closes. Unfortunately, due to over zealous house training, some ballot papers have been spoiled.
BEVERLEY CUDDY
Top Dog
Dogs Today
West End, Surrey

Wong is right to badger Beijing

A cartoon which lampoons communist China is unfair, biased and one-sided. That, says Tony Barber, is the whole point

Should satire offend? Or should a satirist, like a good chef, serve his product with a sauce that pleases everyone? In short, who likes *The World of Lily Wong*, Larry Feign's cartoon strip about life in Hong Kong which *The Independent* recently started to run on its foreign pages, and who thinks it is in poor taste?

Jonathan Fenby, editor of the *South China Morning Post*, is one of those who has no time for Lily Wong. He thinks the strip's portrayal of Chinese people is at best patronising, at worst racist. Like other commentators, he also contends that Feign is doing the people of Hong Kong no favours by implying that, come July, they will be ruled by a bunch of raving communist dictators.

To be effective, however, doesn't satire have to take sides, exaggerate and avoid balance and neutrality? How can a political humourist score points if his message boils down to: "On the one hand, this... On the other hand, that..."

The World of Lily Wong may not be the world's greatest cartoon strip, and everyone will have their own opinion about how funny it is. However, beneath its distortions and exaggerations of Hong Kong life, it is trying to make a deadly serious point.

The strip is saying that, once China takes over from Britain, the people of Hong Kong could see their liberties crushed into the dust. That message would surely lose all its force if Feign took care to present the communist point of view – namely, that there is nothing to worry about.

The point is not whether the strip is right or wrong in its grim predictions of what lies in store for Hong Kong. Quite deliberately, the strip is presenting one side of the argument. So it should. Fairness is not the bedfellow of satire.

For an historical example of how disastrous an effect balance can have on political humour, consider the famous

Satire should make people think; it cannot be neutral

cabarets of Weimar Germany. Contrary to the image presented in the 1972 film *Musical Cabaret*, Berlin's cabaret halls were not, for the most part, places of searingly effective political satire. Many cabarets left political content out of their shows altogether.

However, even the political cabarets were generally careful to mix anti-Nazi jokes with digs at all other political parties, including those which supported Weimar democracy. As Walter Mehring, a leading satirist of the 1920s, once put it: "I stand neither to the left nor to the right. I have always stood vertically."

Such detachment anaesthetised public opinion to the terrible gravity of the Nazi threat. It tempted Germans, even those who disliked the Nazis, to think that no political party was more than the next. Ultimately, it sapped faith in democratic institutions and blinded Germans to the fact that, however imperfect the Weimar system, it was infinitely preferable to what was to come after it.

No doubt the quality of Berlin's satirical cabarets played only a small part in smoothing the Nazis' rise to power. Yet the anti-Nazi satire could have been sharper. Like *The World of Lily Wong*, it could have taken aim at a precise target. It could have taken sides.

To be fair, on some occasions, it did. The most effective parody of Nazi anti-Semitism was the following tune, sung to the music of Bizet's *Carmen*: "It's raining or it's hailing/ If there's lightning, it's we! If it's dark or if there's thunder/ If you freeze or if you sweat/ If it's warm or if it's cloudy/ If it thaws, if there's a breeze/ If it drizzles, if it sizzles/ If you cough or if you sneeze/ It's all the fault of all those Jews/ The Jews are all at fault for that!"

That was cabaret satire at its purest and most effective. It used exaggeration, absurdity and risky subject matter to illustrate the fanatical intolerance of the Nazis. Just as *The World of Lily Wong* does not waste time pondering the strong points of Chinese communism, so this song, sung at the Tingel-Tangel cabaret in 1931, did not debate the merits of the Nazi world-view.

However, it was something of an exception. Far more typical was the view put forward by the cabaret director Kurt Robitschek in 1930. He coined a wonderfully tortuous word, *Nichnack-denkenmüssen* (the freedom not to have to think seriously about anything), to describe what he thought he should offer his audiences.

But Robitschek, who had to flee Germany after the Nazi takeover, was wrong. Satire should make people think seriously. It cannot be neutral or anodyne. Like it or dislike it, *The World of Lily Wong* is right to take sides.

The World of Lily Wong is on page 14



The horror of a new blue dawn

by Polly Toynbee

Nightmare! I dreamt last night that Labour lost. At 4am, panic takes hold. Labour are faltering and slipping in the polls. OK, so it may be a blip, but what if it's not? Like other commentators, I have sniffed the air among the voters and smelt something odd and dangerous. Where are the genuine enthusiasts for Labour? Where are the people who truly, madly, deeply love Tony Blair? Why do so many New Labour and old Labour voters alike sigh slightly when they say they will vote for him? Why are there so many more undecideds than ever, and so many who say they will not vote at all? Is contempt for John Major's government deep, dark and bitter enough to compensate?

It's 2 May. John and Norma are beaming and waving at the window of Number 10. He has rapidly made the only available decision to move sharply to the right, since that is where his new intake of MPs heavily leans – anti-European, anti-social security, ruthless on law and order. Kenneth Clarke has been ditched: no more fudge and mudge. Portillo, Howard, Redwood, Lilley, Leigh, Duncan, Hamilton, Lamont, Forsyth, Taylor and Mawhinney (architect of victory, hero of the hour) are in the rampant ascendant, rewarded with the great offices of state. Lady Porter has returned from exile to become Leader of the Lords.

In a new blue dawn, Major has thrown off his shackles, discarding the tattered remnants of one-nation Conservatism. Narrow political pragmatism is his only constant. Stamping towards withdrawal from Europe, heading for a Little England of trade protection and nostalgia, the business world is aghast. Foreign companies are preparing to get out fast, and the brain drain starts in earnest. Everyone wants out.

What have the voters done? At 4am I am planning a special kind of exit poll of my own in which I shall stand in the high street, clipboard in hand, and ask people how they voted. If they say Tory, I will shoot them, a quick exit.

The trouble with democracy is the voters. Listening to them sometimes makes you despair – they are stupid, selfish, pig-ignorant, horrible. Politicians aren't allowed to say that – and newspapers are not supposed to either, as we all try to seduce and flatter potential voters and readers. But one more vox pop from some cretin saying, "They're all the same, aren't they? They're only in it for themselves," and I'll be reaching for my revolver.

The trouble with the voters is that they really are just in it for themselves: mean about tax, narrow-minded, ungenerous, with no sense of the wider civic good. Kill, kill. And after satisfying my blood lust, I shall emigrate. Where to? The Netherlands, maybe; decent, civilised people, an earnest yet imaginative society. Windmills, tulips and dope.

Calm down, calm down: it's only a bad dream. Take a deep breath, count to 100. Not all voters are stupid and selfish. If the Tories win the 1997 election, it will be the same as all the past four elections: a dishonest conjuring trick done with a minority of the voters. The great British majority will still have voted to throw the bastards out. The great British majority will have understood that democracy is all but done for if the Tories win again. There would be nowhere for Labour to go, nothing to do but drop dead and give up.

'The trouble with democracy is the voters. They sometimes make you despair ... stupid, selfish and ignorant'

They can't go forwards and follow in Tory footsteps ever further rightwards. Nor can Labour retreat backwards to windy rhetoric, land of our socialist fathers, back to the Celtic mists of the valleys and the glens.

So what would we do if the Tories won? Revolution! The will of the people, yet again, will have been thwarted by our monstrous voting system. This time, on hearing the election result, the anti-Tory majority will rise up with one voice, take to the streets as they did in eastern Europe, and stay there until promised a fair voting system and a new general election.

It will start in Scotland, where an outraged tartan army will storm the citadel of Edinburgh Castle, plant the thistle and declare independence from Tory hegemony. And the leek will fly over Cardiff castle, too. We English will be every bit as outraged as the Celts, since even among us the majority of our votes will also have been cast against the Tories (54.5 per cent against, last time). So, a week after the election, the coaches

will pour into Westminster from Truro to Ipswich, from Carlisle to Brighton, demanding genuine free and fair elections. On the great platform erected illegally in Parliament Square (police and Army stand passively by), fiery speeches will pour from the lips of all those currently conducting a far too *soft* voice election campaign against the Tories. Too late, they will find the words to exorcise the corruption of this banana monarchy and the stinking corruption of power of a fifth Tory term. Too late and somewhat sheepishly, all those young non-voters will join the uprising and confess they were wrong. A contrite Swampy will be up there on the platform, too.

In case anyone thinks my views unbecoming of *The Independent* (Is it, Are You?), let me say that I am absolutely certain I would be feeling as passionately – who knows, maybe more so – about the need for a change of government if the Labour Party had been in power for the past 18 years. In fact, the mind boggles at the awful thought: try writing the imaginary *History of the Labour Government 1979-1997: The Foot/Kinnock Years*.

Since he is human, I imagine that Tony Blair must occasionally have his own nightmares. Sometimes in the watches of the night he must awake sweating with the fear of failure. I hope that if he wins, he will have the humility to remember these dark moments. For we do not know – one of the very many things we do not know about him – what he really thinks about proportional representation. Unlike Robin Cook, he never advocated it. He was dragged into agreeing that there should be a referendum on PR at a time when it was expedient for him to work closely with the Liberal Democrats. But we do not know what sort of referendum, or indeed when, or whether he would throw his weight behind PR during a referendum campaign. If he wins a landslide majority, will he and most of the Labour leadership actively campaign for PR, or will they oppose it?

How fine it would be now, in his hour of slight uncertainty, to hear him make a ringing endorsement of the principle of fair voting. Better still if he were to reiterate that belief on the very morning of his victory under the first-past-the-post system. I do not know how he speaks to his God, or what kind of God he speaks to, but perhaps at 4am he may do well to make a pact: "Let me win, O Lord, and I promise to bring in proportional representation to ensure we never again have 18 years of one party minority rule – not even my own."

There are real rural issues: for instance, transport, education, housing, green site development, low pay and agricultural policy. But many of these are either too local or too huge to focus the feeling of marginalisation that rural communities are suffering. Hunting is the right size. According to May's edition of *The Field*, the Conservative MP Greg Knight, replying to a letter from a pro-hunting lobby group, wrote: "I

Pesky things always come in tens

Ten London attractions which no Londoner can imagine any visitor in his right mind wanting to go to:

The Changing of the Guard
Hamley's
Carnaby Street
The Tower of London
Leicester Square
Oxford Street
Starlight Express
London Bridge
11b Baker Street
Foyle's



Miles Kingston

Ten colours never offered by any paint-maker's catalogue:

Earl Grey
Capability Brown
Mood Indigo
Olympic Gold
Consolation Bronze
Seville Orange
Gretina Green
Penny Black
Edmund White
Forever Amber

La Marseillaise
Heidi
Charlie's Aunt
Onward Christian Soldiers
Lorna Doone
Pinocchio

Ten things commonly said to belong to the devil:

Devil's beef tub
Devil's elbow
Hell's teeth
A diabolical liberty
Hell's angels
A snowball in hell
Hell's bells
Devilish bad luck
Devilled kidneys
The hindmost

Ten objects commonly left sticking to the inside of cars which no longer have any practical use, and indeed whose very existence has probably been forgotten by the owner:

Sign saying BABY ON BOARD
Garfield
Furry cube
Sign saying MY OTHER CAR IS A ...

Parking stickers which go up and down with the driver's window inside the door until one day they never come back up again
Comic Relief Day tomato
Name of dealer or garage where car was bought
Sticker bought at Longleat
Sign inciting you to join a rugby club you have never heard of

Ten things sometimes mistakenly thought to have been invented by and named after a Scotsman:

Macramé
Macassar oil
Macabees
Macaroni
Macintosh
Macrobiotics
Macaw
Macra wine
Macbeth
Machicolations

Sticker telling you that if you are close enough to read this you are too close

Ten products whose names seem to have absolutely no connection with the nature of the product:

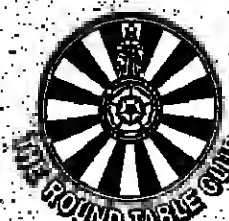
Cherry Blossom shoe polish
Wild Woodbine cigarettes
Imperial Leather soap
Kiwi shoe polish
Famous Grouse whisky
Tio Pepe ["Uncle Joe"] sherry
Penguin books
Camel cigarettes
Robin starch
Mars bar

Ten books, works or compositions which have become famous but whose authors we can almost never remember the name of:

The Adventures of Baron Munchausen
The Swiss Family Robinson
Mary Poppins
Waltzing Matilda



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Townies who would rule the country

Field sports are an electoral issue in my constituency, as the candidates agree. (The term "blood sports" has, for fairly obvious reasons, rather fallen out of use.) The Labour Party have committed themselves only to a free vote on a Private Member's Bill, but it is widely believed that a Labour government wants to outlaw fox-hunting. Many people (both pro and anti) see a domino effect: if hunting goes, shooting and even fishing will be endangered. Certainly the beaters with whom my son worked through the winter believe this. He shouldn't "be Labour", they told him: "they'll ban shooting, and us".

We do have a hunt in the constituency, the Woodland Pychley. We also have a number of shoots and fishing venues, so a concern about employment is involved; but that is not the emotional heart of the issue. A basic freedom is at stake. People who hunt do not see themselves as

criminal or cruel and they know they live closer, and more knowledgeably, with "nature" than their urban opponents. They feel the research is biased and irrelevant – "no one experiments to see if hounds enjoy hunting, which is natural to them. What gives foxes more rights than dogs?" "Foxes do need controlling: why is it worse to enjoy it than to do it miserably?" The ecological argument is unfounded: hunting neither endangers foxes as a species nor damages the environment.

There is also a sense of being picked on. "Townies" who know nothing about it want to ease their consciences at no expense to themselves. The Labour Party is not suggesting banning boxing, which I was told, is crueler to people than hunting is to foxes. I'll think about hunting when they ban boxing on the TV. The most sophisticated version of this came from a woman at church

who told me she was not going to vote Labour after all, because, although she was not particularly pro-hunting, nor anti-abortion, she could not vote for a party that put the feelings of foxes above those of unborn children. All the evidence suggested that a foxes experienced neural distress like a hunted stag, but "that research doesn't get headlines in London newspapers". Or, as an elderly farmworker put it, "They say they don't need the 'nanny state', but they reckon we do."

There are real rural issues: for instance, transport, education, housing, green site development, low pay and agricultural policy. But many of these are either too local or too huge to focus the feeling of marginalisation that rural communities are suffering. Hunting is the right size. According to May's edition of *The Field*, the Conservative MP Greg Knight, replying to a letter from a pro-hunting lobby group, wrote: "I

Sara Maitland

obituaries / gazette

Helene Hanff

Helene Hanff will always be associated with what is, undoubtedly, her most endearing and enduring book, *84 Charing Cross Road* (1971); yet this slim volume of correspondence between herself and Marks & Co, an antiquarian bookshop in London, was written at the lowest point in her career.

For years, as she was later to describe in *Underfoot in Show Business* (1961), she had been writing plays that never got produced, while editing out a precarious existence reading scripts for Paramount Pictures, writing articles for encyclopaedias, television scripts, and children's history books; until one evening she sat down to take stock of herself and her future. "I was a failed playwright. I was nowhere. I was nothing."

It was into this void that there came the news of the death of Frank Doel of Marks & Co from whom for over 20 years she had been ordering books she could ill afford, but which had given her a link with England. "Coming when it did the news was devastating. It seemed to me that the last anchor in my life - my bookshop - was taken from me. I began to cry and I couldn't stop. It was then that I realised that she had to write the story of her relationship with the shop and, in particular, with Frank Doel."

Published in 1971, the book became an overnight success and, even more surprisingly, a cult book. Once, in conversation with me, she referred to it as "my little nothing book; I thought I was writing a *New Yorker* story when I wrote it. I still think it is a nice little short story."

Soon letters, gifts, and telephone calls poured in from all over the country. One such call was from a woman in Alaska and when Hanff commented: "This must be costing you a fortune," back came the unexpected reply, "I'm married to an Eskimo and we live 300 miles from the nearest town. I don't want to wait till spring when the roads clear and we can get into town to the post office." It became one of those books that people passed on, or gave to each other. Hanff told me how the nuns of Stanbrook Abbey near Worcester, an enclosed order of Benedictines, had a single borrowed copy which was

placed in a glass case, and a small American nun was elected to turn one page a day so that the whole community could read it together.

Then, in 1980, I acquired the stage rights and adapted the book as a play for the stage, directing it first in the West End and, the following year, on Broadway. Later it was made into a movie starring Ann Bancroft. Since then the play has been performed all over the world. But it was not until the stage version that Helene Hanff began to make any real money, enough to ensure her at least a reasonable comfort in her old age which was much troubled by pneumonia and bronchial infections (exacerbated no doubt by her excessive smoking), as well as diabetes. Until then, in spite of the book's success, she never made a penny because, as she described on the Dick Cavett celebrity television show, every reader of the book wrote her a fan letter which she would then answer, and she had worked out that the cost of the aerogram equalled the amount of the royalties on each copy of the paperback edition.

It was the book's publication in England by André Deutsch which brought her to England for the first time, only to find that Marks & Co had closed. This, and subsequent visits, led to her writing a sequel, *The Duchess of Bloomsbury Street* (1976). Soon she was giving regular monthly talks for *Woman's Hour* on BBC entitled "Letter From New York". Other books followed, including *The Apple of My Eye* (1978), a quirky look at New York, and *Q's Legacy* (1985) - about the work of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, whose essays found in a library first ignited her passionate love of English literature - and still the letters kept arriving from all over the world.

As a writer Helene Hanff is no Jane Austen or George Eliot. Being a lover of what she once described as "I was there" books, she is at her best when writing about her own experiences. And the six books which she published provide an almost ongoing autobiography. Unmarried, she lived alone; but, although there had been romances, as she once confided to the American actress Olympia Dukakis, who is to play Helene

Hanff in a revival of the play, she was not prepared to write about the more private side of her life.

Perhaps the central irony of that life is that having always dreamed of being a playwright the only thing of hers that was staged was an adaptation of her book. When she was young she had entered and won a playwriting competition sponsored by the prestigious Theatre Guild of New York. Summoned to New York, she met the formidable Theresa Helburn, co-director of the Guild, who told her: "Your plays are terrible, just terrible. But never mind. You have talent." She was given a job in the publicity department of the Guild and once a week studied the craft of writing plays with Miss Helburn. But although options were taken on a number of the plays, none was ever produced.

When *84 Charing Cross Road* opened in the West End (on Thanksgiving Day, of all days, she complained), the audience rose to its feet as she appeared at the end to embrace the stage Helen Hanff played by Rosemary Leach. The next day, in the *Times*, Irving Wardle wrote, "The sight of Helene Hanff on the set of the bookshop she made famous, and blinking under the applause of the town she could never afford to visit, made last night's opening into the end of a fairytale: obscure affection crowned with public acclaim."

Although the bookshop itself is long gone, on the spot where it once stood, is a brass plaque which states simply to every passerby:

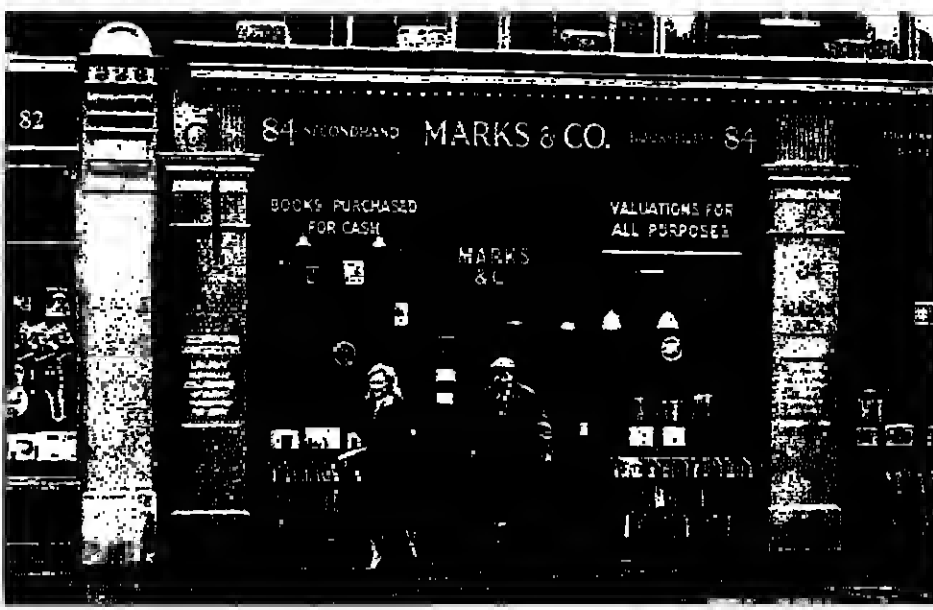
84 Charing Cross Road
The bookcrossers Marks and Co
Were on this site which became world renowned
Through the book by Helene Hanff.

James Roose-Evans

Helene Hanff, writer and broadcaster, born Philadelphia 15 April 1916; broadcaster, *Woman's Hour*, BBC 1978-85; author of *Underfoot in Show Business* 1961, *84 Charing Cross Road* 1970, *The Duchess of Bloomsbury Street* 1976, *Apple of My Eye* 1978, *Q's Legacy* 1985, *Letter from New York* 1992, Helene Hanff Omnibus 1995; died New York 9 April 1997.



'I was there' books: Hanff (above) immortalised Leo Marks & Co (below) in her book *84 Charing Cross Road*



The Rev Canon Frank Colquhoun

Frank Colquhoun was a much respected evangelical priest and popular author in the Church of England. He wrote or edited 26 books of prayers as well as guides to preaching, hymns, the gospels and moral problems. He was also for a time editor of *The Churchman* and editorial secretary of the World's Evangelical Alliance.

His patient, gentle, conciliatory character gave him hundreds of friends in his south country and London parishes and also during his work as a cathedral canon. For six years, from 1966 to 1972, he was Principal of the Southwark Ordination Course, that radical experiment pioneered by Bishop Mervyn Stockwood and Bishop John Robinson.

Colquhoun was educated at Warwick School, Durham University and the Bible Churchman's College at Bristol. He was ordained in 1933 and after curacies in Maidstone and New Malden he became vicar of St Michael and All Angels, Blackheath Park and afterwards Vicar of Wallington.

In 1961 he was appointed Canon Residentiary of Southwark and in 1973 of Norwich. At both cathedrals he preached fine and memorable sermons. He retired in 1978.

Colquhoun was a shy man who did not find a rapidly changing church in a rapidly changing world at all easy, but he was never confrontational. When his evangelical friends asked him how he managed to work alongside such an "unsound and unorthodox" bishop as Robinson, whom Archbishop Fisher called a "stumbling block", he replied that though his book *Honest To God* left him rather cold and his head was in the clouds, Robinson's heart was in the right place. So he was able to see Bishop Robinson as a "most attractive character, not a controversial figure, but a man of devout faith, a dedicated servant of Christ." Colquhoun might have been describing his own ideals.

Colquhoun was the reverse of the gladiatorial ecclesiastic and never rushed into print to condemn the errors of others or to proclaim his old infallibility. His quiet intelligence was welcomed by those who bought and used his many devotional works

based on his interpretation of the Bible and the prayer book.

From 1946 for 50 years he was continuously publishing material for others to use as sermons, services, and in discussion groups and private prayer. His parish prayers in their blue and white covers are almost as inevitable as the various prayer books in the stores of Anglican parish clergy. In the diocese of Norwich his sermons revealed his reverence for the scriptures and his shrewd and kindly commonsense. On public occasions he never allowed any form of controversy, though he did once startle the High Street Committee of Norwich Cathedral by stating that he had put a printed cathedral report into the wastepaper basket unread.

Perhaps he was misled in 1973 by an episcopal invitation into coming to Norwich at the age of 64 which he was persuaded would be semi-retirement and allow him to continue his writing without undue interruption. In fact he became a busy Treasurer and Vice Dean and as director of ordination training he encouraged young ordinands to read deeply. He presided over an interregnum with shrewdness and grace.

"He was a lovely man... A real gentleman" people used to say of Frank Colquhoun. Perhaps he did not succeed in persuading more enthusiastic church people to quieten down though he did his best. In retirement at Bexhill he listened to music, wrote more than a dozen books and kept in touch with his many friends.

Alan Webster

Frank Colquhoun, priest, born 28 October 1909; ordained deacon 1933, priest 1934; Curate, St Faith, Maidstone 1933-35; New Malden, Surrey 1935-39; Vicar, St Michael and All Angels, Blackheath Park 1939-46; Editorial Secretary, National Church League 1946-52; Editor, *The Churchman* 1946-53; Priest-in-Charge, Christ Church, Woburn Square 1952-54; Vicar, Wallington, Surrey 1954-61; Canon Residentiary of Southwark Cathedral 1961-73; Principal, Southwark Ordination Course 1966-72; Canon Residentiary of Norwich Cathedral 1973-78 (Emeritus); married 1934 Doris Slater (deceased); one son, one daughter; 1973 Judy Kenney; died 5 April 1997.

Alan Gibson

Alan Gibson will be best remembered as a fluent, erudite and witty broadcaster who reached his peak nationally in the 1960s when he was an integral member of the *Test Match Special* team, joining E.W. Swanton, John Arlott and Brian Johnston to form an inimitable small orchestra that turned cricket into music for many listeners.

But Gibson was more than a knowledgeable and welcome voice. He was a diarist, an essayist, a hellraiser who would have been at home with Byron, Graceland, Thomas Lord and Lady Caroline Lamb. While radio brought him fame it is his writing that will be personally re-

membered, especially his day-by-day reporting of county cricket in the *Guardian*, the *Sunday Times*, the *Sunday Telegraph*, and most of all, in the *Times*.

His idiosyncratic style attracted a large following. Many of us had never heard of Didcot, never mind the railway junction, until we read of Gibson's almost daily difficulties in traversing it. Through Gibson we learned of the pleasurable company and attractive barmaids to be found on the ground at Bristol, Taunton and Cheltenham. There would be felicitous descriptions of parts of the day's play, of the crowd, of the weather and the summer

blooms. Often, to the fury of the sub-editors, he would totally ignore some sensation in the day's scores.

Almost always there was a touch of humour. One introduction began something like: "I knew my day at the Oval would not be straightforward when I spotted the Cricket Correspondent sitting in a corner of the press box (as in-house newspaper jokes; the *Times* had assigned two correspondents to report the same match)."

He awarded DJ "Dickie" Rutnagur of the *Daily Telegraph* an eternal sobriquet by referring after an hotel stay to the "oriental prankster" who had spirited away his pyjamas. Al-

though Gibson was regarded as a man of the west he was in fact a Yorkshire man, born in Sheffield, the son of a Durham miner who became a Baptist minister. His liberal radical routes were put down at Taunton School, from where he reached Oxford by winning an exhibition. There he took a First in History without, it was said, attending a single lecture and became president of the Union.

After a short but stormy army career he lectured briefly at Exeter University, then stood as a Liberal candidate at Falmouth in the 1959 General Election, having been for some time adopted by BBC West

Region where he produced and presented several programmes including a breakfast show that would have been unlikely to appeal to listeners to Chris Evans.

By 1962 he had joined the *Test Match* team and was featured by the BBC on both cricket and rugby, his connection with the latter sport being interrupted by his standing down from the Springbok visit of 1969/70, a rejection of apartheid. His last *Test Match* broadcast came in 1975 when it became clear that his liking for refreshment brought a noticeable change in the style and content of his delivery later in the day. His greatest moment at the microphone came during the West Indies *Test Match* of 1963 at Lords

when, with one over left, all four results were possible.

Gibson wrote several books including an autobiography, *A Mingling Yarn* (1976), and a minor classic in *The Cricket Captains of England* (1979) that was updated and republished a decade later. He was shy with those he did not know well, though there were younger members of the press box who would have felt privileged to have been invited into his company.

His later days were clouded by illness and his last few years were spent in a nursing home. He was perhaps the most learned of all those who have learned a living from writing about county cricket, his work illustrating again that

the charm and strength of the genre can never be assessed, like that of a great musical performance, by simply measuring the number of spectators.

One of the greatest tributes to Gibson's talents was paid by his contemporary E.W. Swanton who wrote of him: "If Crusoe (R.C. Robertson Glasgow's nickname) can be said to have a successor it is Alan Gibson, whose reports gladden my summer."

The Cricket Writers' Club, his peers, gave their assessment of the respect and affection in which he was held by electing him their first president in 1982.

Derek Hodgson

Norman Alan Stewart Gibson.



Gibson: turned cricket into music
writer and broadcaster, born Sheffield 28 May 1923; married 1948 Owen Thomas (two sons marriage dissolved); 1968 Rosemary King (one son, one daughter; marriage dissolved); died Taunton 10 April 1997.

Professor J. S. Allen

When Professor Joseph Stanley Allen was appointed to the Chair in Town and Country Planning at King's College, Newcastle University, in 1946, he was the sole member of a new department with just a handful of students, most of whom had just been demobilised.

Allen's great charm, wit and friendly personality served him well in the task that faced him. As with several other university and local authority schools of architecture, King's College (which was formerly part of Durham University) had previously included town planning in its curriculum as a part-time study directed to the needs of the planning legislation of the 1930s. However, looking ahead to the post-war developments from the legendary 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, the first proper planning act, King's College produced a syllabus for a five-year full-time under-

graduate course in town and country planning which included a range of subjects far exceeding those of the pre-war planning courses.

By early 1947 Allen had begun to make use of his skill in attracting staff who had some experience in the widened scope of planning (I joined him from the School of Planning in London, to where he had travelled in search of staff in late 1946; I was teaching mostly ex-servicemen on the high-pressure three-month course designed to train overseas planners to do the work of the 1947 Act). From 1947 all staff had the qualities necessary to take on the new fields. The result was that after five years Allen had built up a large and flourishing department, responsible for the first undergraduate course in town and country planning, and left a legacy of a thriving organisation with many research inter-

ests as well as the important task of providing new town and country planners.

Developments in the department included his institution of the *Journal of Planning Outlook*, which still exists today under the name of the *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, while with his great support a full-time landscape design course started in 1951, the first such course after the closing down of the landscape course at Reading University a few years earlier.

In addition to his involvement in the new department, Allen - who was a trained architect - contributed much to the architectural scene, for example designing the new Science Building at Durham University in the 1950s, along with his assistant (Sir) William Whitfield, and to the planning scene, with consultant work at Seascale, Chichester, Accring-

ton, and to the first university plan at Durham. He also served as consultant to the Snowdonia National Park from 1957 to 1974, and was a member of the Forestry Commission North of England Advisory Committee, and of advisory committees for the care of churches in Ripon, Newcastle and York dioceses. On the professional front, he was a member of the council of the RIBA, and president of the Town Planning Institute from 1957 to 1959, being also involved in various committees of his institutes.

Joseph Stanley Allen was born in 1898. He was educated at Liverpool Collegiate School and the School of Architecture at Liverpool University, where he gained an RIBA Athens bursary. After a period of post-graduate study in the United States, in 1929 he became a lecturer at Liverpool University, then strongly under the influ-

ence of Sir Charles Reilly and Sir Patrick Abercrombie, followed by 12 years as head of the School of Architecture at Leeds from 1933 to 1945. It was here that his interest in planning developed, and he founded a part-time planning course in 1934.

A special interest of Allen's outside his professional work was the farm in Ovingham in Northumberland to which he moved in the late 1950s and where he was successful in building up a herd of Jersey cows and Welsh ponies, supported by his first wife Mary, who died in 1974. His second marriage to Meryl Watts was equally a happy one, but she died in 1992.

Joseph Stanley Allen's remarkable memory remained with him until well into his nineties. He could compare architecture and planning in the 1930s with the great changes af-



Allen: town and country planning
ter the Second World War, and with great perception.

Brian Hackett

Joseph Stanley Allen, planner, born 15 March 1898; Head, Leeds School of Architecture 1933-45; Professor and Head of Department of Town and Country Planning, Newcastle University 1946-63 (Emeritus); married 1931 Mary Pugh (died 1974; one son, one daughter); 1977 Meryl Watts (died 1992); died 15 March 1997.

Lesley Cunliffe

At a party in New York in 1979, writes John Calder [further to the obituary of Lesley Cunliffe, 2 April], I met a worried businessman called Hume who, hearing that I was returning to London the next day, told me about his wild daughter to whom he had given a good education and comfortable home, but who had become a drop-out needing help. He could not understand where he had gone wrong.

Two days later I contacted Lesley Cunliffe (her maiden name was Hume), who had recently left her husband, Marcus Cunliffe, a Professor of American Literature at Sussex University. I found her charming but jobless, and recruited her to be my political secretary in the forthcoming election campaign, in which I was standing as an MEP for Central Scotland.

She brought along her current boyfriend, Stan Gebler, Davies, a journalist on the

Evening Standard and *Punch*, who became my unpaid press-secretary, late night telephone answerer, drinking companion, and source of endless jokes for my speeches.

She herself charmed my supporters of all classes and my Tory opponents as well (I stood as a Liberal), and made me seem more conventional than I in fact was. With her Scottish name and soft American accent, diluted by years in Britain among academics, she fitted in easily to the various strata of town and country society in Fife and Perthshire and was totally accepted there.

Her penchant for change, adventure and new experience in no way corrupted the genuinely nice, decent and conventional person she was at bottom, kind and generous, humorous and optimistic, with a social conscience. Her father had reason to be proud, not worried.

Announcements for Gazette BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS (Births, Adoptions, Marriages, Deaths, Memorial services, Weddings, etc.) should be sent in writing to the Gazette Editor, The Independent, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL, telephoned to 0171-283 2011 (outside London 0171-283 2011, and charged at £6.50 a line (VAT extra).

ROYAL ENGAGEMENTS
The Princess Royal, President, Royal Society for the Disabled Association, visits the Highland Games at the Highland Games Association, Highland Games Centre, Bannockburn, Perthshire, 11-12 June (provided by the Welsh Gazette).

Birthdays

Sir Patrick Brown, Permanent Secretary, Department of Transport, 57; Mr Roy Cameron, chief constable, Dumfries and Galloway, 30; Miss Julie Christie, actress, 57; Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Dalton, former deputy Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic, 66; Mr Bradford Dillman, actor, 67; Sir John Gielgud, actor, 93; Mr Gerry Gilman, former trade union leader, 77; Lord Hastings, former and former government minister, 85; Miss Valerie Hobson (Mrs John Profumo), former actress, 80; The Most Rev Dr David Hop, Archbishop of York, 57; Mr Paddy Hopkirk, racing rally driver, 64; Mr Julian Lloyd Webber, cellist, 46; Miss Loretta Lynn, country singer, 62; Mr Michael MacLagan, former Richmond Herald of Arms, 83; Colonel

Sir Robert Macne, former Lord Lieutenant of Orkney, 82; The Right Rev Michael Marshall, Archbishop of Canterbury, 61; Baroness Masham de Ligon, 62; The Right Rev John Oliver, Bishop of Hereford, 62; Mr Patrick Ramsey, former collector, BBC Scotland, 71; The Right Rev Leslie Rice, Assistant Bishop, Winchester, 78; Professor John Roberts, historian and former Warden, Merton College, Oxford, 69; The Ven Raymond Roberts, former Chaplain of the Fleet, 66; Mr David Skipper, director, Westminster Centre for Education, 66; Mr Rod Steiger, actor, 72; Miss Elizabeth Symons, trade union leader, 46; Sir Peter Thompson, Life President, NFFC, 69; Mr George Walker, former chairman and chief executive, Breen Walker, 68; Barbara Warnock, former mistress of Girton College, Cambridge, 73.

Anniversaries

Births: Arnold Joseph Thynne, historian, 1889. Deaths: George Frederick Handel, composer, violinist and organist, 1759. On this day: Abraham Lincoln, 16th US President, was shot by the assassin, John Wilkes Booth, 1865. Today is the Feast Day of Saints Antony, John and Eustace, St Ardalion, St Benezet, St Bernard of Tiron or Abbeville, St Canadoc, St John of Viana, St Lambert of Lyons, Saints Tiburtius, Valerius and Maximus and The Martyrs of Lithuania.

Lectures

Gresham College, Barnard's Inn Hall, London EC1: Professor John Peck, "Industry and the Arts. The Trinity of Charity: culture and the 'real world'". 1pm.

The following notes of judgments were prepared by the reporters of the *All England Law Reports*.

Inheritance tax

Jones & Aar (Administrators of Estate of Bells Deceased) v *Inland Revenue Comrs*; ChD (Lightman J) 14 February 1997.
The administrators of an estate were not entitled to claim relief under ch IV, pt 6 of the Inheritance Tax Act 1984. The word "sold" in s 191 of the Act meant conveyed or transferred on completion of sale, and although the administrators had entered into a contract for the sale of the property it had nev-

CASE SUMMARIES

14 April 1997

Italy and had been "treated together" for the purposes of s 28 of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990. Although the treatment had been provided outside the UK by a doctor who was not, for the purposes of s 28, a person to whom a licence applied, s 28(3), which was *prima facie* restrictive of the freedom to provide services under art 59 of the EEC Treaty, did not infringe art 59.

David Vaughan QC, Barbara Hewson (Kissans) for the applicants; Timothy

VAT
Jubilee Recreation Centre Ltd v Customs & Excise Comrs; QBD (Lightman J) 6 March 1997.

Building work carried out on a protected building was not regarded as used as a sports centre "similarly" to a village hall for the benefit of the local community, which included people working in the area as well as residents.

Andrew Hitchmough (McKienna & Co) for the taxpayer; Michael New QC (C & E) for the Crown.

الأمم المتحدة

On Thursday two of the market's laggards report. Food group Albert Fisher should produce interim profits mod-

Honise of Fraser, the department stores chain, has almost been written off by libertarians. Since arriving in 1994 its shares have slumped 27% they are now hanging on at 12p. John Richardson at NatWest Securities expects year's profits to be little higher at £14.6m. But he points out a 1 per cent recovery in margins equates to £8m operating profits and HnF is rich property assets.

**Stock market reporter
of the year**

performed as it displayed a vulnerability to outside shocks—the latest known upset is harsh winter weather devastating its cockle harvest. Rayale at stockbroker Hichens Harrison recently tipped them treble in 18 months.

Horse of Fraser, the department stores chain, has almost been written off by the City. Since arriving in 1994 its shares have touched 22p; they now bump along at 16½p.

John Richards at NatWest Securities expects year's profits little higher at £1.6m. But he points out a 1 per cent recovery in margins equates to £8m operating profits and NatWest is rich property assets.

[illegible]

John Richards at NatWest Securities expects year's profits little higher at £14.6m. But he points out a 1 per cent recovery in margins equates to £8m of operating profits and Halford is rich property assets.

129	Intecm	155	+2	33	292
13	ISA Holdings	690	-5	27	4433

business & city

Business news desk: tel 0171 293 2636 fax 0171 293 2098
BUSINESS & CITY EDITOR: JEREMY WARNER

It's bad to talk as gurus clash over BT's £200m ad campaign

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

The two leading figures behind British Telecom's £200m advertising and marketing effort have privately clashed over the way BT is being promoted, in a rift that raises questions about its future strategy.

The row is over the role of Ed Carter, an American marketing guru who in the past two years has spearheaded some of BT's most aggressive promotional campaigns in the face of in-

creasingly stiff competition from the cable companies.

Mr Carter's attempts to widen his influence over BT's advertising strategy have brought him into conflict with its long-standing advertising agency, Abbott Mead Vickers (AMV), which dreamt up the widely admired campaign slogan: "It's good to talk". The BT advertising account is hugely lucrative and the largest of any UK company.

Last year the Carter influence resulted in a fundamental shift

in the commercials. From attempting to grow the overall phone market they moved to using the actor Bob Hoskins to promote individual products. Industry sources close to the dispute said it had culminated in a stand-off over AMV's latest offering, which attempts to revive the "good to talk" catchphrase, using the actor Hugh Laurie.

Mr Carter, one of the brains behind the hard-sell advertising strategy used by BT's US partner, MCI, is said to believe the

AMV approach is too esoteric. He is also credited with bringing MCI's "friends and family" promotion to BT, which has proved popular with customers.

Michael Baulk, chief executive of AMV, attempted to play down speculation of a rift, saying: "Ed believes very much in the power of using advertising to sell directly to customers products and services and in that he's right. We believe that what you need to do in addition is to use advertising to build BT's brand values and to build

a broader relationship with the British public." He added: "It honestly isn't a question of one versus the other. The best programme for BT is both."

The internal debate has taken on increased importance following figures showing the cable companies have been poaching customers from BT at a much faster rate. In the three months to December BT lost 77,000 residential customers a month to cable, up from 60,000 for much of the rest of 1996. Cable operators believe privately they are

on the verge of achieving "critical mass".

Worse still for BT could be the threat from the £5bn cable merger involving Cable & Wireless's Mercury subsidiary, Bell Cablemedia, Videotron and Nynex CableComms, to be completed later this month.

Mr Carter's influence began in 1995 with "Project Mark", a programme to refine BT's customer database using the software consultants SAS Institute. It enabled the company for the first time to identify specific

groups of consumers by calling patterns, age or other criteria.

The next phase started last year with the creation of the "win-back" teams, groups of telephone marketing staff who targeted former customers who had switched to cable.

The move led to allegations, denied by BT, that it was mounting a "dirty tricks" campaign against its rivals. So successful was the Carter strategy that BT recently announced plans to employ 2,000 more telemarketing staff. Armed with the the

Project Mark information they aim to call most domestic customers at least four times a year.

Mr Carter, who could not be contacted, is variously described by those who know him as "brilliant" and "extremely opinionated". One source said: "The fact that Ed is not directly employed by BT, despite being so influential, means he can be brutally honest. He's not a man you'd forget if you met him. Apart from the fact that he's 6 feet 5 inches, he is totally and utterly fearless."

Co-op profit dive steps up pressure

Nigel Cope
City Correspondent

The Co-operative Wholesale Society will come under renewed pressure today as it reports that pre-tax profits have more than halved. Andrew Regan's Lanica Trust, which is stalking the Co-op, is likely to use the decline in performance to highlight the movement's inefficiencies and press the CWS Board to consider its approach to buy parts of its non-food businesses.



Andrew Regan: Poor figures strengthen Lanica's hand

Though Mr Regan has received advice from political quarters not to go ahead with his bid before the general election, others in his camp have counselled that the prospects of a Labour government would not necessarily undermine his attempts. The poor trading figures may therefore act as the spur for Mr Regan to seek a special meeting of CWS members to discuss his proposal. He would need 10 of the 150 regional societies that control the CWS to support his campaign to restructure a special meeting.

John Owen, who stepped down from the Society's executive committee a week ago, said yesterday that though Mr Regan might have the backing of some smaller societies it would be unlikely that his support base was wide enough to pull off a deal. "I think he has very little chance of getting any significant support. There may be some people out there with a chip on their shoulder but I think he is on to a losing situation. We consider this an intrusion and an unwelcome distraction from what we are trying to do."

He added that the 30-plus members of the CWS board represented around 90 per cent of the membership "and they are unanimous in their opposition to the Lanica proposal".

CWS trading results for last year are expected to show a decline in pre-tax profits from £31.4m to just £14m due to falling trading profits and the effect of exceptional items. Trading profits fell from £58.7m to £48.5m.

CWS is also thought to have reported a loss of £5.6m on pulling out of some activities and a further £36m loss on a property venture with P&O called Slough Observatory.

There are also costs associated with redundancy payments. The accounts should also detail the retirement package of David Skinner, the former chief executive, who was paid £388,000 last year.

As the Co-operative Bank which is owned by the CWS, recently announced profits of £45m, the figures will call into question the operating performance of the remaining businesses. Some, such as the funeral parlours, are thought to

be trading profitably. This would mean that other parts of the business, most notably the food retailing operation, must be trading at a loss.

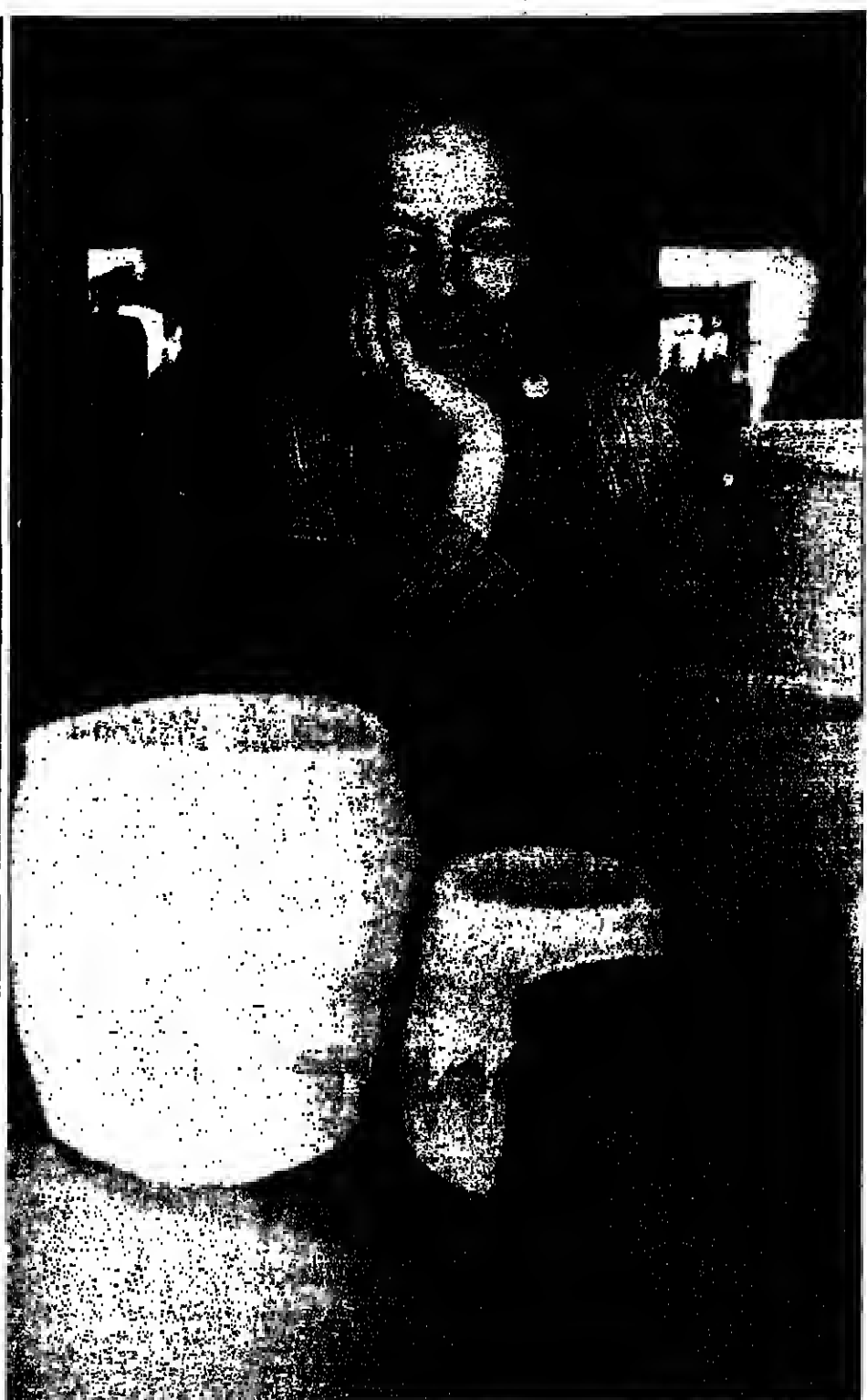
Graham Melmoth, who took over as chief executive of the CWS last autumn, is expected to use the publication of the group's figures today to outline his strategy for improving the Society's performance.

This is expected to include plans to reduce central costs as well as improving staff incentives.

Though the Co-op is keen to trim its cost base, it is reluctant to do so at the expense of the CWS's federal role within the movement.

This includes acting as the administrative centre for the other regional societies as well as supporting the Co-operative union, the movement's secretariat in Manchester.

Lanica Trust has estimated the Co-op's cost to be £16m. Andrew Regan would cut £10m from these costs if his bid were successful, as well as offering incentive programmes for workers while pruning middle management jobs.



Holding out for a stock market listing: Dawna Walter, the managing director and founder of the Holding Company, a niche retailer of domestic storage products such as CD racks and "bra dividers" which is coming to the market through a listing on Oxfex, writes Nigel Cope. The company currently has one

store on London's King's Road, which opened two years ago.

However, it hopes to use the £850,000 being raised on Oxfex to open stores in Glasgow and Leeds and to develop its mail order operation.

Trading in the shares will start in May. Photograph: Nicola Kurtz

Wall St and job figures to fuel jitters

Michael Harrison

Financial markets are expected to open in a jittery mood this morning as dealers react to last Friday's 148-point plunge on Wall Street and brace themselves for the release of key economic data on this side of the Atlantic.

The sharp fall in the Dow Jones, driven by inflation worries, took the index below 6,400 for the first time this year and resulted in US share prices retreating for the fifth week in a row.

The key day for UK economic data is Wednesday when the publication of unemployment and average earnings figures will give an indication of the strength of inflationary pressures in the domestic economy.

The market is looking for a further fall in unemployment in March of between 40,000 and 50,000 following February's 68,000 decline. Average earnings rose to 3 per cent in January fuelled by bonus payments in the City, and are expected to remain around the same level.

However, if the fall in unemployment is considerably more pronounced, dealers may conclude that it makes an increase in interest rates more likely after the election.

Separately, Incomes Data Services said that pay rises were keeping ahead of inflation with more than half this year's settlements running at 3-3.5 per cent. Only one in 10 was below the headline inflation figure of 2.7 per cent.

Elsewhere, producer price figures due out today are expected to show little in the way of inflationary pressures while Thursday's Retail Price Index is forecast to show a slight dip in the underlying rate of inflation from 2.9 per cent in February to 2.8 per cent in March.

Input prices are forecast to have fallen year on year by around 6.5 per cent thanks to the strength of sterling while output prices are not expected to have increased year on year by more than 1.5 per cent.

John Sheppard, chief economist at Vantage, said: "The implications should be that, whilst rates are going up, the extent of the rise will turn out to be modest - possibly no more than 0.5 per cent on base rates."

Simoo Briscoe of Nikko Europe, meanwhile said there was a case for an incoming Labour chancellor to leave interest rates unchanged. He said that a rate rise would do nothing to combat the biggest problem for the economy - the strength of sterling.

Moreover, Gordon Brown might resist being "railroaded" into moving on rates given that Labour had made so much play about needing to look over the books and overhauling the policy framework for interest rate decisions.

£1.6bn carpetbagger bonanza fears

Michael Harrison

A building society chief warned yesterday that up to £1.6bn of speculative money could start flowing into the coffers of the remaining mutually owned societies as "carpetbaggers" reinvest their windfalls from earlier flotations.

Mike Jackson, chief executive of Birmingham Midshires, said that 7,000 speculative accounts had been opened with it in the last month alone since bonus allocations were announced for

savers with Woolwich and Halifax. He estimates that at least 10 per cent of the 16 million investors with money tied up in converting societies will open speculative accounts with other societies in the hope that they will be the next to convert.

In addition to Halifax and Woolwich, Alliance & Leicester and Northern Rock have also announced bonus allocations, leaving savers free to move their money into different societies.

An estimated £125bn has

been tied up in societies that are floating as investors wait to qualify for their windfall bonus. Mr Jackson said that some of this money or the windfall bonuses themselves would be re-invested. If 10 per cent of investors took the opportunity to re-invest in the remaining mutuals then it would mean an inflow of £1.6bn based on an average minimum opening balance of £1,000.

Birmingham Midshires is considering raising its minimum opening balance to deter

carpetbaggers. It estimates that 90,000 of the 270,000 new accounts opened with the society last year were speculative, resulting in a £50m inflow.

The society is concerned that a new wave of speculative activity will hamper its ability to attract new customers and harm its existing customer base because of the impact on the branch network, staffing levels and administration.

Mr Jackson said the industry should brace itself for a renewed wave of speculator activity.

Anxious unions urge Rolls to speed sell-off

Chris Godsmark

Unions representing almost 900 staff employed at Rolls-Royce's power generation division in Derby are to meet the group's senior management today to urge them to speed up the sale of the business in the face of imminent job cuts.

The representatives hope to hear from John Rose, Rolls-Royce chief executive, whether a buyer for the business, International Combustion, has been found following last week's sale of the company's Parsons steam turbine division on Tyneside to Siemens of Germany for £30m.

Today's meeting comes as Rolls-Royce prepares to make 180 of the 890 workers at the plant redundant next month.

The Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions fears the company has been unnecessarily delaying the sale, putting hundreds more jobs at risk. The last word from the employers suggested that the sell-off may not take place for "weeks or months".

Roger Smith, of the joint union committee at the company, said: "I don't think anybody at this late stage can prevent the latest round of job cuts, but we are worried that if things drag on much longer the whole business won't be viable. This must be sorted out soon."

Rolls-Royce threatened Derby with sale or closure at the same time as Parsons last July, taking a £250m charge to cover write-offs and redundancy costs for the two businesses.

Tom Stevenson
City Editor

Granada's interim figures in June will be hit by a £160m write-off against the value of its computer services arm, which analysts believe will be the next non-core business to be sold by the TV and leisure group.

The group, headed by Gerry Robinson, has decided to take the exceptional charge this time because the unexpected success of the recent Welcome Break, Exclusive hotel and Alpha Airports stake sales means the hit will be more than offset by one-off profits. Analysts believe the sale could raise £90m.

There is increasing speculation, meanwhile, that long-time supporter Mercury Asset Management is steadily selling

shares in Granada having held a 13 per cent stake at one point.

The sale of MAM's stake in Forte was key to Granada's success in last year's £3.9bn hostile bid.

MAM is known to have been unhappy at having such an exposed position in the leisure sector's largest stock and the drip-feed of its shares on to the market in recent weeks.

A company spokesman said the fall, which included a 24.5p tumble last Friday to 881.5p, reflected a correction after they had jumped recently in response to the sale of the Welcome Break chain of motorway service stations.

But dealers believe MAM is unwinding its position, with some speculating it is irritated at the way Granada's public denial of a bid for neighbour Yorkshire Tyne-Tees left it with burnt fingers in that stock.

The Welcome Break sale alone netted a £142m surplus over book value and the Exclusive hotels to have been sold so far raised £40m more than net assets.

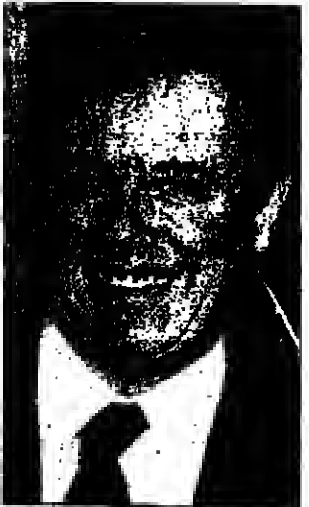
The success of the recent deals, which have raised more than £1.3bn to set against the £3.9bn cost of the Forte acquisition, has taken some pressure off the group in its bid to find a buyer for its 68 per cent stake in the Savoy group of hotels. However, a deal is expected within the next few months following a move to

clean up the Savoy's balance sheet with a hotel revaluation at the time of the group's recent results.

Granada said at the time of its bid for Forte that it would raise £1.3bn from disposals by September 1997.

It is now certain to raise considerably more, having reached its target early without yet selling the Savoy stake. In the books at £261m, or some of the smaller hotels in Forte's 17-strong Exclusive chain.

The planned sale of the computer division, which made profits last year of £9m from its maintenance and disaster recovery services, is the latest move towards focusing the company on two main divisions - hotels and catering on the one hand and media on the other.



Gerry Robinson: Hotel sale profits come to the rescue

STOCK MARKETS									
FTSE 100									
Index	Close	Week's chg	Change (%)	1996/97 High	1996/97 Low	Vol (m)	Dividend	Yield (%)	P/E Ratio
FTSE 100	4271.70	+35.1	+0.8	4444.30	4056.60	3.77			
FTSE 250	4518.40	+3.6	+0.1	4726.40	4489.40	3.55			
FTSE 350	2106.40	+14.0	+0.7	2194.30	2017.90	3.75			
FTSE SmallCap	2284.27	+1.9	+0.1	2374.20	2178.20	3.04			
FTSE All-Share	2077.68	+12.9	+0.6	2163.94	1989.78	3.67			
New York	8391.69	-134.4	-1.6	7085.16	5032.94	1.97			
Tokyo	12715.67	-144.9	-1.1	12798.80	11703.95	0.88			
Hong Kong	12287.84	+83.3	+0.7	13868.24	12055.17	3.42			
Frankfurt	3312.88	+87.9	+2.1	3480.64	2848.77	1.65			

Source: FT Information

INTEREST RATES									
UK interest rates									
Rate	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months	1 Year	2 Year	3 Year	5 Year	10 Year	Govt Bond
UK	6.05	6.97	7.68	8.15	7.77	8.28			
US	5.63	6.31	6.98	6.95	7.18	6.92			
Japan	5.23	5.77	6.11	6.51	6.74				
Germany	3.25	3.21	3.58	3.51	3.74				
Bond Yields (%)									
Rate	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months	1 Year	2 Year	3 Year	5 Year	10 Year	Govt Bond
UK	6.05	6.97	7.68	8.15	7.77	8.28			
US	5.63	6.31	6.98	6.95	7.18	6.92			
Japan	5.23	5.77	6.11	6.51	6.74				
Germany	3.25	3.21	3.58	3.51	3.74				
MAIN PRICE CHANGES									
Index	Close	Week's chg	Change (%)	1996/97 High	1996/97 Low	Vol (m)	Dividend	Yield (%)	P/E Ratio
Premier Oil	40	4.5	12.7	12.7	12.7	0.65	62	8.6	
Senior Engineering	131	13.5	11.5	11.5	11.5	313.5	29.5	8.6	
Howden-Sharp	147.5	15	11.3	11.3	11.3	217	18.5	7.9	

CURRENCIES									
\$/£									
Index	Close	Week's chg	Change (%)	1996/97 High	1996/97 Low	Vol (m)	Dividend	Yield (%)	P/E Ratio
\$ (London)	1.6250	-1.53e	-1.5137	1.6144	1.6144	0.6144	0.26	0.6806	
\$ (New York)	1.6275	-0.7e	-1.5113	1.6144	1.6144	0.6144	0.26	0.6806	
\$ (Frankfurt)	2.8011	+1.77e	2.7773	2.7773	2.7773	1.7241	+0.048	1.5013	
¥ (London)	204.971	+1.352	184.221	184.221	184.221	126.140	+2.005	108.49	
£ (London)	95.7	+1.1	83.8	83.8	83.8	105.9	+1.6	95.7	
OTHER INDICATORS									
Index	Close	Week's chg	Change (%)	1996/97 High	1996/97 Low	Vol (m)	Dividend	Yield (%)	P/E Ratio
Oil Brent \$	18.10	-0.51	-2.80	23.06	15.50	2.7190.9	16 Apr		
Gold \$	348.05	-1.3	-0.4	394.80	348.05	2.6107.0	25 Apr		
Gold £	212.95	+1.19	0.6	260.88	212.95	8.006	6.75		

IN BRIEF

• Six key German economic institutes will warn Chancellor Helmut Kohl this week that Germany will miss the public deficit target for a single currency. They are forecasting it will be 3.2 per cent against the Maastricht criteria of 3 per cent. Despite this Mr Kohl insisted yesterday that neither the criteria for EMU nor the launch date of 1 January 1999 were open to debate.

• More than two-thirds of companies are suffering from short-shares, according to a survey by Reed Personnel Services. Short-shares are most acute in the retail sector where 75 per cent of firms complain of a lack of suitably qualified staff.

• Severn Trent, the English water company, has signed a multi-million five-year deal with the Scottish electricity supplier Hydro-Electric to handle all its billing, marketing and mail shots.

• A privatised train company is launching the first train miles scheme. Great North Eastern Railway offers passengers one point for every £10 spent, redeemable against rail and sea travel and theatre tickets. The offer will be restricted initially to first-class passengers.

الاعمال من الاعمال

Windfall tax a necessary evil to pay for jobs

GAVYN DAVIES

The Tories have run into the problem that they introduced a retrospective levy on the profits of the high street banks under Mrs Thatcher. What was sauce for the Tory goose in 1981 is now sauce for the Labour gander

In 1992, when Gordon Brown first suggested the idea of a windfall tax on the profits of the privatised utilities, to pay for special measures to eradicate long-term unemployment for young people, the Labour Party seemed so far removed from the levers of power that scarcely anyone paid much attention. Five years later, while there are still doubts about whether the levy represents a "good" piece of tax policy – and indeed while some people complain that the "expropriation" of private property should not be tolerated in a free society – the shadow chancellor's political antennae so far seem to have served him well.

For, while almost everything else in the party's programme has undergone profound change, the windfall levy remains, the one distinctive landmark in an otherwise cautious Labour manifesto. If there is one thing in the programme that will get traditional Labour voters into the polling booths on 1 May, this is it. It is surprising that Labour has not yet found ways of making its proposals on youth unemployment a central and positive feature of its campaign, though there is still time.

Perhaps there is a concern that even at this late stage, the Conservatives might succeed in frightening the electorate about the impact of the windfall levy itself. But that looks difficult. It is interesting that the existence of the levy has not soured Labour's determination to be seen as the new party of British business. In both business and the City, there seems to be a reluctant accep-

ance that the profits made by many utilities after privatisation were hard to justify, and came partly at the public expense. These high returns demonstrated either that the assets had been under-priced at the time of privatisation, or that regulation had been too lax since then, or both. Furthermore, it is recognised that many managers in these companies became very rich, not through entrepreneurial flair, but through sitting in the right place at the right time.

This, no doubt, is why the levy is the closest thing to a popular tax that has ever been invented. The Government has never been able to persuade the public that this tax is the work of "unprincipled scoundrels", Ken Clarke's endearingly old-fashioned description of the Labour leadership. In fact, every time the Government has sought to exploit the levy as a political issue, it has simply raised the visibility of what the electorate believes is a damned good idea.

Furthermore, the Conservatives have run into the problem that they themselves introduced a retrospective windfall levy on the profits of the high street banks under Mrs Thatcher. What was sauce for the Tory goose in 1981 is now sauce for the Labour gander. In fact, there was enough support for the levy on the Tory side for Mr Clarke to have considered introducing a similar measure of his own in the Budget of 1995.

Some officials in the Treasury reckon that he was seriously tempted before finally rejecting the option, on the grounds that it was just too far distant from the Govern-

ment's overall economic philosophy to be politically feasible. Despite its electoral advantages for Labour, the Institute for Fiscal Studies argues that the levy offends against some of the principles of good taxation. The main problem is that the levy will not necessarily hit the same shareholders who received the excess profits in the first place. In the first few days of trading in the shares of the privatised companies, about a quarter of the shares typically changed hands, and of the original 12 RECs, only Southern Electric has not experienced a total change of ownership since flotation. So there is no doubt that some of the main original gainers from privatisation will escape from the tax scot-free, though Labour points out that most large institutional shareholders have stuck around, and will owe pay the tax.

Mr Brown has still not clarified the size, or the exact basis, of the levy. According to a study released last week by Goldman Sachs, a levy of around £5bn has been discounted by the stock market, which is around £2bn more than Labour has promised to spend on its job creation programmes. The £5bn payment might be spread over two or more financial years, but the tax would be unequivocally defined to be a one-off. Any other course would run the risk of increasing the cost of capital for the utilities, which in turn could feed into higher prices at the next regulatory review. Obviously, if the burden of the tax were felt by the consumers of electricity and water,

rather than by the shareholders, it would soon lose its political acceptability.

There are many options for the basis for the tax. The only important restriction is that the base should not be subject to the charge that it discriminates between individual companies, or sectors, on arbitrary grounds. Such discrimination would leave the tax liable to challenge in the courts, either in the UK or Europe. But assuming the tax is based on a uniform percentage of some clearly defined aggregate – like profits, sales, assets or excess returns to shareholders – and as long as it applies to all the regulated privatised utilities, there seems little prospect of it running into serious legal trouble.

The most likely base is the excess return enjoyed by shareholders, over and above the average for the entire stock market, in some specified past period. One advantage of this approach is that it would come fairly close to matching the rationale for the tax. Another advantage would be that a Labour chancellor could in effect choose exactly the companies he wanted to hit, by selecting an appropriate period over which to calculate the excess shareholder return.

For example, if Mr Brown wishes to include gas and telecom in the net of the tax, he would select a period such as the first four years after privatisation, when all companies earned high excess returns.

If, on the other hand, he wishes to exclude gas and telecom, he would select a much longer period – such as from the date of privatisation to the end of 1995. Since gas and

telecom earned sub-par returns over the second half of that period, they would incur no tax, though they would in theory be included in the tax net.

The point is that varying the basis for the tax gives a convenient and legal way of discriminating between companies. If a Labour government wished to raise more than £5bn from the tax, that would suggest a need to include gas and telecom, and would dictate the former basis for the levy; while if it only wishes to raise £3bn, the second basis would be appropriate.

Few economists would argue that a tax of this type is desirable in and of itself. Indeed, what tax would be? But if we accept that something needs to be done about the evil of hard-core youth unemployment, the money has to be raised somewhere. If anyone has any better ideas, they had better speak up before the employment measures are launched in July.

A £5bn windfall levy – who pays?

Who	Liberal range
Electricity	1.3-2.2
Generators	0.8-1.3
Water	1.0-1.4
Gas	0.0-0.5
BT	0.0-0.4
Transport	0.2-0.6
Total	5.0

Grocers pose 'serious' bank threat

Nigel Cope
City Correspondent

The traditional high street banks face a serious threat from the supermarkets' moves into financial services as consumers perceive "normal" banks as "arrogant" and "unhelpful" with poor levels of service. In contrast, the supermarkets are viewed as helpful,

friendly and with opening hours that suit their customers.

The findings are the result of an on-going "Mind and Mood" research project run by FCB, the London advertising agency. It has interviewed 3,000 people as part of an attitudes survey which holds over 100 discussion groups a year and is described as the largest continuing qualitative project of its kind being

undertaken in the UK. The research shows that banks are seen as austere places "which think they are doing you a favour by offering you facilities" and which offer products they are keen to sell rather than those its customers really need.

By contrast, comments made about the new supermarket banks operated by Tesco and Sainsbury were far more posi-

tive. The expectations of these new banks is that they will be service-oriented with longer opening hours, friendlier staff and simple systems.

But though the broad dimes of the supermarkets are trusted more than those of the banks, the research highlighted potential problems if the supermarkets make mistakes with their banking operations.

Business backs stakeholder plan

Roger Trapp

Britain's business leaders have provided a significant boost to the "stakeholder" concept associated with Tony Blair's New Labour party by supporting the view that a truly successful company will better serve the needs of customers, employees, suppliers and the wider community.

The Mori study for the Centre for Tomorrow's Company published today found 72 per cent of industry backing this approach.

But 44 per cent went further, agreeing with the statement that "business cannot succeed without recognising that it is accountable to other stakeholders as well as shareholders".

The centre was set up in the

wake of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce's inquiry into the company of the future, to promote the idea of the "inclusive approach" to business.

It seized on the survey findings as evidence of a fundamental change in attitudes since the Tomorrow's Company inquiry began in 1992.



Tony Blair: Business boost

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back page: the week starts here

IN THE
INDEPENDENT
THIS WEEK

TUESDAY
Val Kilmer
The face of
the new
Saint



THURSDAY
Duane Hanson
The master
of the
plastic body



FRIDAY
The Charlatans
The launch
of their
latest
album

WHERE TO GO, WHAT TO SEE, WHAT TO DO

EVENTS

Twinkle, twinkle

Stars: If the glimpse of galaxies beyond our own provided by the comet Hale-Bopp has excited you, then the annual *Fortean Times* convention at the Institute of Education, Bedford Way, London WC1, is for you. A "weekend of the weird, the wondrous and the wacky" includes Chuck Berry being beamed out from the Voyager spacecraft. 19th, 20th, 10.30am, £15 one day/£25 both (01789 490215).

To catch a view of the comet, which must be seen this week at the latest, Hampstead Heath is an ideal spot - look towards the north-west.

More stars: Today's premiere of *The Saint* is a celeb fest, with Kate Winslet, the Chemical Brothers, Duran Duran and Ian Wright among those attending. Call 0171-420 0000 for tickets at £30-£60, 6.30pm for 7.30pm, as the Sidies TV series gets the Hollywood treatment.

Yet more stars: The crew of *Baywatch* - David Hasselhoff, Donnie D'Erco, Traci Bingham and David Chokachi are in town to promote the new series, which begins on ITV on Saturday (5.45pm). On Tuesday morning, the Royal Albert Docks becomes a mini-California as they shoot a scene that will be shown on *National Lottery Live* on Wednesday evening at 8pm (BBC1), on Thursday afternoon, they will be at Planet Hollywood between noon and 2pm for a competition to find a beach babe/boy and on Saturday, they'll be on Radio 4's *Loose Ends* at 10am.

THE ARTS
In season
Theatre: A translation by the late Angela Carter of a play by Frank Wedekind, *Spring Awakening*, is premiered at the Harrogate Theatre, Oxford Street. Tues-Thurs, £5-70, £10-80, Fri-Sat £5-70-£12-40, Sat mat (on second Sat of run) £4-70 (01423 502116).

Visual arts: For a chance to see beyond the limited picture painted by crime statistics, art students serving life-sentences at Wormwood Scrubs bring an exhibition of their work to the Riverside Studios, Hammersmith on Thursday. The exhibition is opened by the ex-Blockhead Ian Dury. Free. 10am-10pm, Fri 10am-4pm, W/E noon-10pm. Ends 27th. (0181 741 2251).

Dance (modern): Joaquin Cortes prepares to set fire to audiences across the country again with his *Gipsy Passion* tour, combining a traditional flamenco style with contemporary choreography, at the Royal Albert Hall this week (0171 420 1000/0171 344 4444).

TV: The latest testament to our seemingly insatiable desire for all things hospital-related, and the chance to give Channel 5 a try on Sunday at 7pm, is a documentary, *Intensive Care*, following the fortunes of all the people connected with a single hospital bed, which naturally can't avoid bringing into view the question of NHS funding.

Photography: The Edge of Madness presents prints and murals by Tom Stoddart and Alister Thain in the Main Foyer of the Royal Festival Hall, chronicling the four-year siege of Sarajevo, marked by General Mladic's comment "Shell them

until they can't sleep, don't stop until they are on the edge of madness." To 18 May, free, 10am-10.30pm (0171 960 4242).

Film: A Welsh *Trainspotting* is how actor/documentary-maker Kevin Allen's directorial film debut, *Twin Towns* has been billed, with twin brothers (Rhys Ifans and Llyr Evans) on a quest for revenge. Just opened in England and Wales, you can catch it in Scotland and Northern Ireland next week.

Pop: Dance/trip-hop artist Tricky's tour kicks into gear. Tickets are selling fast for all concerts. Southampton Guildhall (14th), Shepherds Bush Empire (15th), Hackney Empire sold out (16th), Sheffield University The Foundry (18th), Liverpool's Royal Court (19th) and Leeds Town & Country Club (20th). Ends 21st (Norwich UEA). Doors open 7.30pm, £10/£11 London venues.

Talk: A coup for Books Etc and the Royal Festival Hall as Ralph Fiennes speaks out in the Chelmsford Room with his sister Sophie on Friday. Not about *The English Patient*, but on his mother's (Jennifer Lash) last novel *Blood Ties* (Bloomsbury), which has overtones of autobiography - hence the family presence. 7.30pm, returns only, £5/£2.50 concs (0171 960 4242).

SPORT AND LEISURE

Different ball game

Sport: Women's rugby football, with as much laddishness as the men's version, if *C4's Women with Balls* documentary last year is to be believed, reaches a peak with the National Cup Final at the Harlequins ground, Twickenham, on Saturday. 2pm, £5, £4 students, £2 u-16 (0181 892 0822 indiv/0181 994 0822 groups).

Travel: Head into the sunshine with *Love in Springtime*, a two-night cruise with Scandinavian Seaways. Choose from Harwich to Esbjerg, Denmark (dep 15 April), or Hamburg, Germany (dep 17 April). From £99 a person, including cabin, breakfast, smorgasbord buffet, three-course dinner and a tour of your destination (0990 333111).

Travel (further): Mexico City is one place to be clear of the election. *Quest Worldwide* offers midweek departures at £285 (plus £20 tax) return price, ending with the end of April (0181 546 6000).

Music: Those looking for something different this week, should head for the Marching Band Championships at the Albert Hall on Saturday. Doors open at 11.45, £14 on the door.

CURRENT AFFAIRS

Heated debate

Seminar: 'Who's Afraid of Feminism?' Seeing through the backlash, at the Institute of Contemporary Arts on Friday, addresses the *Loaded-style* and party-political backlash against the movement, "family values". Speakers include Ann Oakley, author of *Sex, Gender and Society*, and writer Yasmin Alibhai-Brown. 10am-6pm, The Mall, London. Tickets £20, £15 ICA mems and concs, £7.50 minimalist mems (0171 930 3647).

Summit: G7 finance ministers meet for a weekend economic summit in Denver, Colorado, to



discuss the consequences of EMU, international currency markets and the influence that the dollar has on inflation.

Politics: "Let the people decide", a song written in "a pop-rock style" for the Referendum Party - written with the best democratic traditions in mind, according to the publicity - is unveiled today by Reverend George Hargreaves.

Spring clean

This week is National Spring Cleaning Week. Tidy Britain Group's anti-litter campaign, with 2 million people involved annually. Or go for the opposite effect with the 'English Day of the Dead' on Sunday, an annual day of awareness organised by the National Death Centre with the Natural Death Handbook Awards for best Woodland Burial Grounds and Best Coffin Shops (0181 208 2853).

For those unable to take up our holiday offers, don't despair as 27 per cent of people in the UK haven't been abroad in the past 12 months.

Housewives in the North-west drink 53 per cent of the champagne consumed there - as opposed to only 47 per cent in Greater London. A good alternative destination? James Aulenast, Catherine Jay

Dance (classical): Reversing the usual roles, after the film comes the ballet, *Darcey Bussell, a better Juliet* than Bayadere, and Igor Zolensky, dancing Kenneth MacMillan in his first time, are the big-name stars in his full-length version of *Romeo and Juliet*, starting at Covent Garden tomorrow. You'll have to hurry to get one of the few slip seats left for this classic of 20th-century choreography, danced to Prokofiev's rich symphonic score. 15th/18th, £2; 16th £2-£12; 19th, Day seats/standing/returns only (0171-304 4000).

A Totton woman who appeared on my television screen during a news bulletin said: "How can I vote for Martin Bell? I want to have a professional politician as my MP." I thought back 24 years, to a by-election in the Isle of Ely.

In 1945, the Isle had been the only constituency to have moved to the right. The voters elected a soldier instead of a banker. James de Rothschild (Lib) had broken his leg a month before the election; his wife and her companion campaigned for him, and the seat was won by Major Harry Legge Bourke (Coo), father of the well-known Tiggy.

Some weeks later, when all the votes had been counted and Parliament convened, the major went to Ely station, Westminster-bound. The stationmaster congratulated him and asked if he might give a few days' notice of his annual visit to Cambridgeshire, as had been the practice of his predecessor.

Legge Bourke was a thoroughly honourable, decent man, but not even his best friends would have accused him of being a fine speaker, a deeply political thinker or one dedicated to his constituents. When they wrote to him with problems, he referred the letter to the minister responsible; when the minister's office replied, he sent the reply to the constituent, with a "with compliments" slip.

Sir Harry died after 28 years of doing nothing wrong... except for being barred from the Palace of Westminster for three days for throwing a penny piece.

At the by-election, the Fen people got me. Professional politician? I was a television cook (when there were only two of us), sports columnist, broadcaster, author of children's books and winner of the *Daily Mail* London-to-New York air race. Politically, I was anti-Conservative and admired Jo Grimond - which very few people did not.

"What will you do for us", people had asked at my pre-election meetings. My best, I replied, promising to do nothing much until I had learned how one did things in the Commons.

I never became a "professional politician", whatever that might be, but was re-elected four times and became increasingly fond of my job.

Being an MP - and Martin Bell will discover this - is even better than being a communicator, for there is no editor, libel reader or proprietor to tell you what not to say. MPs have no job specifications. If they think a coffee evening in Grunty Fen is more important than a vote, lucky people of Grunty Fen.

Professional politicians have this burning ambition to achieve office, which means keeping on the right side of the whips, voting as advised to vote, and speaking when deputed to do so, on the lines that the party has agreed to pursue.

Long live the amateur politician - amateur as in loving the work one does - who does what he thinks is right, what makes sense, and what will be to the general good of his constituents, to whom he will have made clear that he holds certain personal views on which he will not be moved: hanging, field sports, federalism and Sunday shopping, perhaps.

At Westminster, my party, the Liberals, as they were, already had eight members. Bell's task, as sole independent, would be easier in that his speeches will not annoy his colleagues. But it will also be more difficult with nobody to fight his corner for an office, organise a pass for his research assistant, provide reminders of when to apply for Private Members' Bills, motions and adjournment debates, and give help with details of when to table questions. As for selection to go on parliamentary freebies, such as a delegation to commemorate the silver

jubilee of a Speaker's Chair in Harare, he will miss out. Trips abroad are awarded for giving the whips a trouble; also, a single-member party will need someone to mind the shop.

In Finland, parliamentary salaries decrease the longer a member stays in parliament. The reasoning is that a new and inexperienced MP is keen, and will pursue issues regardless of the likelihood of success; the longer you have served, the less likely are you to chase "ifly" causes.

Finnish cynics maintain that this wage structure is correct: when you have been in for a while, your contacts are sufficiently lucrative to obviate the need for state salary. The cynics have a point: it takes a bit of maturity in office before people consider rewarding your services to them. Political lobbyists like to deal with professional politicians.

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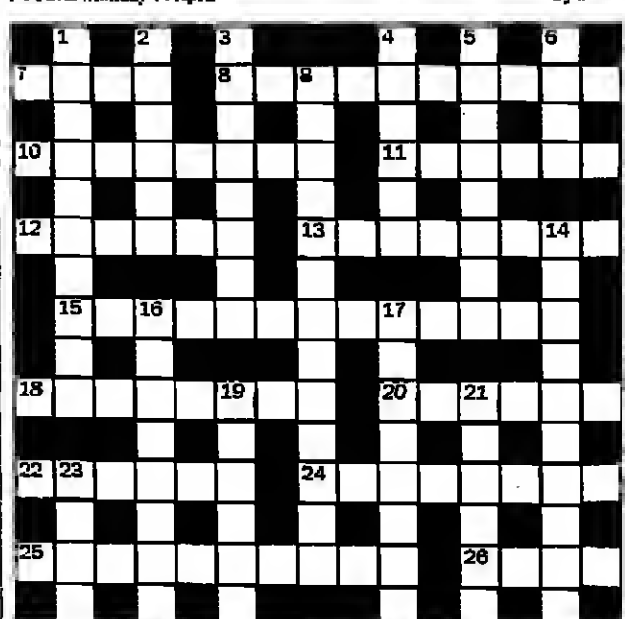
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THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No 3272. Monday 14 April

By Fortia



- 24 Clear intention to produce an office design (4,4)
25 Meant to run organised military display (10)
26 Can be made from scratch (4)

DOWN

- 1 Used support worker (6,4)
2 Exclude one from tree grant (6)
3 City building one recalls (8)
4 Trashy art gear's oo order (6)
5 In the minority? (8)
6 Sounds like a part of church land (4)
9 Allow report to be prepared about key English statesman (6,7)
14 Right sort of look? (10)
16 Upset open container (8)
17 Touchy about artist several parody (8)
19 Taking part for amusement (2,4)
21 Girl concealed brooch and is lying (6)
23 I approve set up linked to new image (4)

- ACROSS
7 Champion flyer failing to finish (4)
8 Diane's sort of arrangement shows dexterity (10)
10 Green wood (4,4)
11 Boy's weight still increases (6)
12 Trouble on oavy quarter decks (6)
13 Tries again with point of drill (8)
15 European isn't wanted so becomes utterly desperate (2,4,4,3)
18 Rising excitement before battle (8)
20 Award a mark, verbally (6)
22 Excellent bit of advice spinner gets (5)